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COLLECTION OF FOREIGN AUTHORS,

No. V.

META HOLDENIS.

M E T A H O L D E N I S

A NOVEL

FROM THE FRENCH OF
✓
VICTOR CHERBULIEZ



NEW YORK
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
549 BROADWAY 551
1877

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META HOLDENIS.

I HAD been told, madame, that you have a fancy for marrying off your friends. You write to me from the banks of the Rhine that I am very talented, that I have an excellent disposition; you tell me at the same time that you hold at my disposal a charming young girl that would just suit me, since she is a German, a musician like yourself, fond of painting, and especially of my pictures, and in addition to a poetic imagination is possessed of domestic accomplishments; in short, that she is indued with all the qualities requisite to make the happiness of Tony Flamerin, your servant. The portrait you draw of her is a speaking one. I see her now, with her light hair and her big kitchen-apron tied around her neck, holding in the right hand a cooking-spoon, and in the left a pretty gilt-edged 18mo, one eye watching a saucepan, and the other shedding tears over the misfortunes of Egmont and Clara. I am truly obliged to you for your kind intentions; but, are you quite sure that I am not already married, or wellnigh so? And then, here is the point: you assure me that your young friend has eyes of a celestial blue! Ah! madame, celestial blue

eyes ! A whole story hangs thereby, which I must relate to you ; you are discreet, and will keep it to yourself :

I.

I WAS about twenty-five years old, and for three years had been studying painting in the studio of a master whom you know, when I received a letter from my father, a good Burgundy cooper, lately retired from business, which obliged me to start for Beaune in great haste. My valise was soon strapped. To tell the truth, I was uneasy, and not well satisfied with my conduct ; I dreaded the paternal face and frowns. Not that I had any very heavy misdeeds on my conscience ; I was passionately fond of painting, and could work for three weeks straight along without indulging in the least recreation ; but there were times when I would break loose, and then commit two or three big follies all in one breath. What makes the pleasures of youth so expensive is chiefly vanity. I was crazy to have people speak of me, and liked to stun the fellows in the pit ; but this admiration of my friends cost me considerable money, and my finances were generally at a low ebb. I had not yet meditated over the maxim of that wiseacre, who said, "There is so great a difference between the man whose fortune is already made and him who has yet to make it that they are two creatures of entirely different species."

On arriving home, I found my father in a little paved court-yard where he liked to smoke his pipe. Folding his arms, he scrutinized for a while in silence

my rather showy toilet, which was, to be sure, not that of a poor studio devil, and shook three times his big Burgundian head, whose bald spots shone like the staves of his casks ; then, perching himself upon a barrel—"Tony Flamerin, my only son," said he to me, "stand there, before me in the sun, and look down on the ground ; you will see there the shadow of a fool." +

"There are pardonable follies," I replied, with considerable assurance. "Mine will soon be at an end."

"Yes, on the straw or in the poor-house," retorted he dryly, sending forth, one after the other, big puffs from his pipe ; then, raising his voice—"Tony Flamerin, you wished to become a painter. You stupidly fancy yourself a man of talent ; the only talent I know you to possess is to squander your property. It is the fault of your poor mother. God rest her soul ! She had made up her mind that you were too delicate, that your hands were too white to become a cooper, like your good-man father. Well ! we send young master in apprenticeship to a wholesale merchant of Lyons, who dismisses him at the end of the year for besmearing his memorandum-books with landscapes. Meanwhile, the worthy woman dies, leaving to this good-for-nothing fellow her whole personal fortune, twenty-eight thousand five hundred francs ; and I, wearied out with useless remonstrances, allow that rare genius to go and study painting in Paris. . . . Tony, look again at your shadow, and tell me whether it is not indeed the shadow of a fool ! Tony, just count up if you please, how much there is left of those twenty-eight thousand five hundred francs of your late mother."

I looked at my shadow : it was not that of a fool ; it had a kind of contrite air, and seemed much troubled in its conscience.

“Tony,” continued he, “you have spent three years in Paris ; you have not earned there a red copper ; on the other hand, you have spent sixteen thousand francs, without mentioning the centimes.”

“Two thousand the first year,” I said ; “four thousand the second, eight thousand the third—a geometrical progression. I confess it was going it rather strong, but then !—”

I involuntarily smacked my lips and smiled, for I could not help recalling at that moment a certain pretty, sprightly face. . . . I shook my head, the face disappeared as through a trap-door, and I saw nothing before me but the big, round eyes of my father, flashing with rage.

“I really believe you are jesting !” cried he, throwing his pipe on the ground, where it broke into pieces.

“Heaven forbid ! I am never more serious than when I look like laughing.” And I approached him to embrace him. He pushed me off. However, I confessed my faults with so much humility, I made so many promises to mend my ways, that he softened down.

“Enough of these grimaces and protestations !” said he. “I have a proposition to communicate to you, which, if you refuse, all shall be over between us ; I shall never want to see you again.”

I begged him to explain himself, and received the following information : My uncle Gedeon Flamerin

had emigrated twelve years previous to America, where he had made a fortune in a banking-house, and become a person of note. Having remained a bachelor, and, his solitude growing irksome, he wrote to my father, offering to take me to his house, to see to my success in life, in short to adopt me as his son, his partner, his successor; three qualifications which made me shudder. He required only that, before embarking for New York, I should spend a few months at Hamburg and London, where I should learn German and English. The postscript of his letter appeared to me still more astounding; it ran as follows: "My nephew Tony is, it appears, a sort of hair-brained fellow. No great harm; youth must sow its wild-oats: but too much is too much. Get him a wife. There is nothing like it to stop the gallop of a young man and bring him to a moderate pace. If Tony can find at Beaune or Hamburg a nice girl that would consent to become my daughter-in-law, I shall be happy to welcome her at my house.

I could contain myself no longer; the mere mention of a wife exasperated me. "Make a husband of me—oh! that is too much!" I cried. "The letter is anything but welcome, and the postscript is odious. The devil! if one hands people a glass of wine they do not relish, one should at least see that there are no flies at the bottom."

"Think it over," cried my father, whose wrath was kindled afresh. "Your uncle offers you a fortune; you may sacrifice it to your oil-painting, if you like, only I tell you one thing—don't depend any longer on

me. I commenced life with nothing ; by dint of hard work I amassed four thousand francs' income, and I tell you that, as sure as I am a Burgundian, I mean to live long and comfortably ; I am just cut out for that. You will have nothing from me till you have buried me ; depend on that"—striking his forehead—"it's written here !" The motion was expressive, and left me in no doubt as to his earnestness. "To-morrow," he added, "I shall settle with you, and shall turn over to you what remains of your mother's bequest—twelve thousand-odd francs, for I do not mean to be your banker any longer, and to have to protect your pennies against yourself. You may make a mouthful of it ! When you shall have no other choice left between New York and the hospital, perhaps you will consent to taste your uncle's wine ; you may have yet to swallow the glassful and the flies at the bottom too. Amen !"

Had I followed my inclinations, I would have returned post-haste to Paris ; but, notwithstanding my uncle's bad opinion of me, I was not quite such a hair-brained fellow as he thought. I did not believe in half-way artists—a painter without talent seemed to me always some sort of a fool. Although I had considerable faith in my genius, I had also at times my misgivings. The profoundest convictions have their days of weakness. After having turned the matter over in my mind—"There may be," thought I, "some means of coming to terms both with Providence and my good uncle Gedeon, and, since he wishes me to go to Germany and learn German, I will go there ; it will not hinder

me from painting. In a year hence I shall know who I am and what I am worth." In consequence of this reasoning, I determined to go and study, not at Hamburg, but at Dresden, for I could not live without a picture-gallery.

I was not long making up my mind ; my natural vivacity cannot brook delays. I at once communicated my intentions to my father, keeping, in the mean time, certain side-thoughts to myself. He rewarded me for this act of submission by a vigorous blow on my back, and draining his wine-cellar during the fortnight I spent with him, so as to keep me in good-humor. One morning I bade him farewell, and I left, carrying with me his blessing in my heart, and thirteen thousand francs in my pocket—a considerable surprise to the latter.

Heaven, meanwhile, had decreed that I should learn German before reaching Germany. I traveled from Beaune to Geneva in company with a corpulent gentleman, middle-aged, with fresh and rosy complexion, and of pleasing and dignified countenance. His name was Benedict Holdenis. He had a certain unctuous way of expressing himself about things in general, and especially about improving the condition of the suffering classes, upon Kindergartens, and the necessity of developing early in little girls moral reflection and the sentiment of the beautiful. I fancied at first that this philanthropist was some Protestant ecclesiastic ; but he informed me that he was a merchant, that he had left Elberfeld ten years before to establish himself at Geneva, where he conducted a large hardware

business. His conversation, I confess, was rather too high-flown for me, still I pretended to enjoy it—I felt under such great obligations to him for having taken me, on the strength of my cravat and my good looks, for a young nobleman traveling for his pleasure. He asked me in a discreet tone where my father's property was situated. I told him the truth, but with so much art in my explanations that it in no wise diminished the favorable opinion he had formed of me. Not to conceal anything from you, I must own also that I sought and found an opportunity to open before him my pocket-book, the obesity of which called forth a to me very flattering exclamation; he did not suspect that, like the Gascon philosopher, I carried all I was worth with me. O youth! what a simpleton thou art! In short, we became such good friends that on leaving the cars he offered me his services, gave me his address, and made me promise to come to see him if I should make any stay at Geneva.

My intention at first had been to continue my journey without stopping; but who does what he wishes? In leaving the waiting-room of the railway-station, I ran against a specimen of real gentry—an American, six feet high, called Harris—whose acquaintance, as an idler, I had made in Paris. He used to come at rare intervals to the studio, to study painting at his leisure moments; but his chief occupation was to spend his income and while away the time, in which attempt, however, he scarcely ever succeeded. He could find nothing entertaining in Geneva; in beholding me, he raised his big arms to heaven, and blessed Providence

for sending his spleen so unhoped-for a prey. Persuaded by his eloquence, I went to engage a room at the Hôtel des Bergues, where he was stopping ; and for two weeks we did nothing from morning till night but sail on the lake, where more than once we were in danger of capsizing. We spent our nights in interminable piquet-games, beer-drinking, and throwing the empty mugs at each other's head.

One day we took a long horseback-ride. I was riding a chestnut full of pluck and fire ; and Harris, who was an adept in horsemanship, and rather chary of his compliments, having deigned to praise my talents in that direction, I flattered myself that I was cutting something of a figure in the world. In the evening we stopped at a country inn for refreshments. At the extremity of the arbor, where we had taken our seats, sat a family, just finishing a rural meal. A young girl of about eighteen, apparently the oldest of the children, stood facing me at the table, evidently fulfilling the duties of major-domo, for she was carving a fowl. To protect herself against the sun that here and there slid through the foliage, she had put a *fichu* on her head. It was this which first attracted my attention, but the face underneath it interested me far more. Harris asked me jestingly what I could find to admire in so ugly a creature ; but I gave him to understand that he was no judge in the matter.

This ugly creature, as he called her, was a brunette ; rather short than tall, with chestnut hair, eyes of the clearest and sweetest blue ; indeed, two veritable turquoises, and a beauty-mole on the left cheek. She

was neither handsome nor pretty: her nose was too heavy, her chin too square; her mouth too large, her lips too thick; but she had, on the other hand, that peculiar charm of I don't know what, which bewitches: a nectarine complexion; cheeks like those fruits one longs to bite into; a face that resembles no other face; an ingenuous air, a caressing look, an angelic smile, and a singing voice. Her way of carving fowls was indeed adorable! Her four younger sisters, and two little brothers, were holding up their plates to her, opening their beaks like so many little chickens waiting for their food. She helped them all to their satisfaction. Her father, who had his back to me, called to her in a honeyed voice and German accent, which sounded strangely familiar to me, "Meta, you keep nothing to yourself, my dear!" She replied in German, and she must have said something charming, for he cried, "*Allerliebste!*" an exclamation I had no need of going to Dresden to understand. At the same time he turned toward me, and I recognized the venerable face of my traveling-companion.

M. Holdenis, who was to live henceforth in my memory as the father of the most charming ugly creature I had ever met, remembered me at once, and, as I advanced toward him, received me with open arms. He asked permission to introduce me to Madame Holdenis, a large, stout woman, round as a ball, rosy, ugly, and not the least charming. I excused myself for not having called on him before, and did not leave till I had obtained an invitation to dinner for the next day.

"Look here!" said Harris, somewhat sulkily, as

we had again mounted our horses, "what do you mean with these Holdenises?"

"I want to paint the portrait of their daughter," I replied; "I have never had my imagination so inflamed as it was this evening."

"You are insane!" cried he, striking his horse a sharp blow. "The girl, to be sure, is good-looking enough; she has a pretty hand, a pretty form, fine arms, and through her chemisette I could see the beginning of superb shoulders. I might even add, to please you, that her bust may some day develop into fine proportions; but I assure you that all the rest is not worth a straw."

"And I tell you, my good friend," I retorted, "that you have no artist's eye. Beauty is too indefinable a thing to express. Mademoiselle Meta Holdenis will some day be an object of great admiration."

M. Holdenis lived in a comfortable country-house, five minutes' walk from the town. The place was called Florissant, and the house Mon-Nid; you will see by-and-by that I have had good reasons for remembering these names. I was punctual at the rendezvous, despite Harris, who had sworn to make me miss it. M. Holdenis welcomed me with the most amiable cordiality. He collected immediately his seven children, placed them like organ-pipes all in a row, according to age and size, and gave me their names. I had to listen to the story of their precocious exploits, their winning ways, their natural wit. I expressed my delight and put Madame Holdenis into ecstasy. "They are the very children of their mother!" said the husband—and,

looking lovingly at her, he kissed chivalrously both her very red hands.

During this time, the busy Meta came and went, lighting the lamps, making bouquets to stand on the mantel-piece, sliding into the dining-room to help the servant in setting the table, and from there darting into the kitchen to give an eye to the roast. Her father told me that they called her, in the house, little mouse, *das Mäuschen*, because she moved about so noiselessly; she had the secret of being everywhere at once.

The meal seemed to me delicious, for had she not had a hand in it? But what appeared still more admirable was the appetite of my host; I was, indeed, afraid he would hurt himself: all went off well, however; we took our coffee on the veranda, in the star-light—the honeysuckle and jasmines intoxicating us with their perfume. “What matters it whether one lives in a palace or in a hut?” remarked Monsieur Holdenis, to me, “provided one keeps a window open to a bit of blue sky?”

Having called back his progeny, he arranged them in a circle and made them sing psalms. Meta beat the time for the young concert-singers, and at times gave them the key-note; she had a nightingale-voice, pure as crystal.

We returned into the parlor. Games followed the psalms, until, the clock having struck ten, the worthy pastor of the flock made a sign, well understood by all, which stopped all merriment and introduced family-worship. He then opened an enormous folio Bible,

over which, bending his patriarchal head, he remained a few moments silent as if to collect his thoughts, and then began to improvise a homily upon the text of the Apocalypse : "These are the two olive-trees, and the two candlesticks, standing before the God of the earth." I thought I understood him to mean that the two candlesticks represented Monsieur and Madame Holdenis ; the little Holdenises were as yet only bits of candles, but with proper efforts were expected to grow into wax-tapers.

As soon as he had closed his big Bible, I rose to take my leave. He grasped both my hands, and, looking at me tenderly with tears in his eyes, said : "Behold our every-day life. You have found Germany even in this foreign country. I do not wish to hurt your feelings, but Germany is the only place in the world that knows what real family life means—that perfect union of souls, that poetic and ideal sentiment of things. And," added he, with an amiable smile, "I do not think I am mistaken when I say that you seem to me worthy in every way to become a German."

I assured him, looking sideways at Meta, that he was not mistaken ; that I felt within me something that looked very much like a touch of divine grace. Half an hour later I repeated the same to Harris, who was waiting for me, furiously impatient, before two bottles of rum and a pack of cards. "Out of what holy-water font do you come ?" cried he, when he saw me ; "you smell of virtue half a mile off." And, taking a brush, he dusted me from head to foot. He further tried to make me promise that I would not return to Floris-

sant ; but in vain. To punish me, he attempted to make me drunk, but, when one thinks of Meta, one does not get intoxicated on mere rum.

If Mon-Nid proved to my taste, my dear madame, the compliment was reciprocated, for Mon-Nid was also well pleased with me ; I felt a welcome guest there ; was made a great deal of ; was liked, in short. When I submitted my project to learn German, to M. Holdenis, he offered with a rare kindness to give me every day a lesson ; and, as on the same occasion I expressed to him a great desire to paint his daughter's portrait, he granted me the request without very much ado. The consequence was, that the nephew of my uncle Gedeon spent every day several hours in the sanctuary of virtue ; the time given to Ollendorf's grammar, however, was by no means the most agreeable : not that M. Holdenis was a bad teacher, but his disquisitions seemed to me rather long-winded. He repeated too often that the French were a giddy people, that their poets and artists were devoid of ideality, that Corneille and Racine were cold rhetoricians, that La Fontaine was wanting in grace and Molière in mirth. He demonstrated also, at too great a length, that the German was the only language that could express the depths of the soul and the infinitude of sentiment.

On the other hand, I always found Meta's sittings too short. The portrait I had undertaken was to me the most attractive I had ever attempted, but also the most laborious of tasks. I often despaired of going creditably through with it, so hard was it for me to

express what I saw and felt. Is there anything more difficult than to reproduce with the brush the charm that is not beautiful? to fix on the canvas a face without decided lineaments and features, whose whole worth rests on ingenuousness of expression, on blushing candor, on the caresses of the eye, and the luminous grace of the smile? Nor was that all: there lurked in that angelic face something else, which I strove in vain to render. There are all sorts of angels, you know, madame: those we see in Germany are different, again, from those of other countries; their eyes, which are sometimes turquoise-color, have that peculiarity that they promise, in mystic language, pleasures which turn out to be no pleasures at all, and only troubles and pains. Whoever has traveled in your country will understand what I mean; he must surely have met with women of adorable candor, who breathe the very voluptuousness they seem ignorant of—virginal innocences, capable of converting a libertine to marriage and virtue, because he imagines that he will not lose anything by it; in short, angels sublimely ignorant of all vice, but to whom, again, nothing vicious would be a matter of surprise. But enough of that; I only wished to explain to you why I despaired of succeeding with Meta's portrait. She seemed always very willing to sit for me, and appeared to like my company. She was, in turns, serious and playful. When serious, she would question me about the Louvre, or the history of painting. When inclined to merriment, she amused herself talking German to me, and made me repeat ten times the same word after her. I generally

answered as well as I could, making use of all I knew; my cock-and-bull stories made her sometimes laugh until the tears came. I gained by it the right of calling her by her pet name *Maüschen*, which I managed to bring in in all I had to say; and, as the word was hard to pronounce, it proved the most useful of exercises to me. At the end of every sitting, and to pay me for my trouble, she would recite to me "The King of Thule." She recited with exquisite taste, and whenever she came to the last lines—

"Die Augen thâten ihm sinken,
Trank nie einen Tropfen mehr"—

her eyes filled with tears, and her voice became so faint and trembling that it seemed to die away. She sang that beautiful song so often to me that I soon knew it by heart, and indeed know it yet.

These were our amusements. There was another in which I alone indulged. I often wondered, looking at her, whether I loved that amiable girl as a lover or as an artist. I soon learned, however, what to think about it. She used to fix her hair with a sort of careless grace. One morning, as she had had the unfortunate caprice to smooth it down close to her face, and hide certain wandering curls that played on her forehead, I lectured her on the subject, and told her that a cold correctness was the death of art. Thereupon she began to laugh, untied sportively her abundant hair, which fell like a shower over her face, and, with her elbows on her knees, looked through the chestnut-waves fixedly at me with those sky-blue eyes. I have

told you before what may be sometimes read in the eyes of these German angels. I hardly know exactly what hers meant, but I felt plainly that I did not love them for art's sake; and that same day, coming back to my hotel, I talked so wildly to Harris on the subject that he declared to me in the most contemptuous tones that, in his opinion, I was a lost man; that I was about drowning myself in a cup of milk, which for an artist is certainly the most despicable of ends.

It is certain that, to my great astonishment, the most domestic ideas began to bud in my romantic brain; catching my head with both hands, I would sometimes ask myself if it was still my own. From day to day, from sitting to sitting, I felt the aversion I had conceived for marriage gradually diminish. It seemed to me even that there was some sense in Uncle Gedeon's postscript. I persuaded myself that an accomplished housewife was a great resource, and an excellent thing in the life of an artist; a housewife that unites with an innocent heart a cultivated mind, the love for the beautiful, and that particular grace of manner that scatters flowers on the paths of life; a housewife that can weep in reciting "The King of Thule," and who understands how to cover up the lower pleasures of this world with leaves of roses culled in heaven. To cap the climax, M. Holdenis praised to me one evening the German custom of long betrothals. "Look," said he, in a lyrical tone—"look now at some young man who is about leaving his home to battle with the world. You will find him walk contemptuously by the noisy pleasures of the capital, and the wild, un-

ruly doings of the children of the age. What is it that guards him against temptations? What talisman, what amulet, protects him against all witchcraft and all stain? Ah! it is the sweet and chaste image of his light or dark haired bride which he carries with him engraved in his heart! She awaits him; he has promised to return to her with a pure soul and pure hands. The angel of chaste love watches over him, and keeps the tempter off." Shall I confess it—this speech, which might as well as not have been an harangue *ad hominem*, sounded eloquent to my ears! This shows how far I was gone.

The strongest spur to love is jealousy. Now, for two weeks I had been annoyed by an ominous guest, who came regularly every day to Florissant—a certain Baron Grüneck, whom I heartily wished back in his native Pomerania. He was an old bachelor, bordering on sixty, an odd little man with a cough, much bent, wearing a wig, and with legs so stiff that they seemed to be all of one piece. I think he suffered from a sort of articular rheumatism; perhaps, also, in his younger days, he had swallowed a cavalry-sabre, which he had not yet digested.

What provoked me was, the ado that was made over this clown. A few remarks, moreover, dropped unawares, together with his officious attentions and fawning assiduities, set me a-thinking. He would always take a seat by Meta, and had a strange way of looking at her—eyes into eyes. He recited madrigals to her, presented her with emblematical bouquets tied with long black-and-white ribbons, whereon were

pictured Potsdam and the King of Prussia passing his cavalry in review. During our sittings he would often whisper to her in German, of which protracted gibberish I could not understand a word, and which used to act dreadfully on my nerves. One day, when she was thirsty, he went to get her a glass of water. She drank half; he took the glass from her, and swallowed the rest at one draught, crying, "It is nectar!"

I was provoked with Meta for tolerating such familiarities, and particularly for allowing him to play with the ribbons of her belt. To be sure, she exchanged every now and then a smile with me, which was a sufficient satire on the old baron to set my heart at rest. Still, her kindness seemed to me rather excessive.

I thought it prudent not to wait any longer, and to declare my intentions at once. I considered that my first duty was to dispel forthwith, by a frank explanation, the illusions which the excellent M. Holdenis entertained in regard to my fortune and profession; not only had I not contradicted them, but I had also confirmed him in them, by my expensive way of living, and my passion for chestnut horses. It so happened that one morning he came to see me at my hotel. He greeted me with his usual amenity, but I could perceive a cloud on his fine, downcast brow, and that reminded me that he had for some time been rather absent and anxious. "He wants to speak to me," I thought, "and is disappointed that I do not encourage his confidence."

However, he spoke at first only about indifferent

subjects. I determined to break the ice, and, from the heart to the mouth, gave him the whole history of my youth—of my artist's dreams and ambition, of the last conversation with my father, the cooper, and of the letter of my uncle Gedeon. He was surprised for a moment, and looked like a man just awakening from a dream; but he soon collected himself, questioned me on various points I had touched too lightly upon, and entered into the details of my little affairs with exceeding kindness. He represented to me that the career of an artist was a rather hazardous one; that no doubt I had much talent, that his daughter's portrait was a proof thereof; but that I should not carelessly reject my uncle Gedeon's proposition; that the sentiment of the ideal ennobled all trades, and that the banking business would not prevent me from painting at my leisure hours.

"We will talk this over again, some time or other," he continued; "but allow me now to scold you a little. I hardly dare say it, but it seems to me that you do not look seriously enough upon life, which is so serious a thing; that your expenses must outrun your resources, and that you carry the heedlessness of youth a little too far". . . . Then, after a pause: "You are going to send me off, now, as a bore and an indiscreet mentor. Come, allow me to put you to a test. Is it not dangerous for a young man of your disposition to carry twelve thousand francs or more about his person, to say nothing of the folly of letting this money lie unproductive. Keep two thousand, and give me the ten other thousand to invest in my business.

Thank God! my affairs are in so good a condition that I can give you a large interest: intrust me with it; the dividends included, it will bring you ten per cent., which will make you a sure little income. Is that asking too much of you? Is the effort too great a one? Come, there is a beginning to every thing, to fortune as well as to wisdom. You ought to consent to this trial."

In speaking thus, he coaxed me in all sorts of ways—called me his dear child, and the like. It appeared to me plain and certain that he would not be so interested in my virtue if he did not see in me the future husband of his daughter. I made a powerful effort, went to my secretary, and took out ten bank-notes of a thousand francs each. I must confess to you, however, that I looked a while at them considerably perplexed; the notes themselves seemed agitated. I handed them to M. Holdenis, who gave me forthwith a receipt for them. Then rising, and fixing upon me a most paternal look, he said: "It is well; I am sure your conscience feels easy now; believe me, this alone is happiness;" and, on taking his leave, he folded me in his arms.

I do not know whether my conscience felt particularly easy; I did not take the trouble to examine it; but, for myself, I felt quite satisfied with the bargain I had just made. I had exchanged my ten thousand francs for the permission to open my heart to Meta. There remained nothing more to do than to find a suitable opportunity. I lay several days in wait without being able to find one. The insupportable Baron Grüneck would not stir from the place. At last, thanks to his

rheumatism, which one day obliged him to keep his room, I obtained the long-wished-for *tête-à-tête*. Meta wore, that evening, a cherry-colored bow in her hair, and a belt of the same color; she had on a very pretty white dress, the ample sleeves of which displayed the beauty of her arms. It was one of her serious days: some dream or other was filling her head, and was peeping at intervals through her eyes; but, like the phantom that it was, would as quickly flit away, as if frightened by the light.

After dinner she went alone into the garden. I followed her, and found her seated on a bench, where I took a seat beside her. The night was warm, and the nightingales were singing. The twilight had left on the horizon vague gleams that gradually died away, and the stars began to shine one after the other. Meta, who knew everything, named them each to me as they appeared. She next began to talk about the other world—about eternity; she told me that, to her, paradise meant a place where the soul breathed God with as little effort as the plants breathe the air here below. After having listened to her awhile, “My paradise,” said I, whispering into her ear, “is this bench here, and these eyes of yours.” In saying this, I wound my arm around her waist, and, raising hers to my lips, I printed a long kiss on it. She disengaged herself slowly, but without anger; and, before withdrawing her hand from mine, she allowed me to press it against my lips; it was burning hot. All at once some one called her; she ran off, and I was obliged to put off the conclusion of my speech to some better time.

I slept imperially that night ; my dreams were delicious, and my awakening still more so. I was not expected at Florissant before the afternoon, but I hastened there early in the morning, so heavily hung upon my lips the word I was prevented from saying—so anxious was I to bind myself by an irrevocable vow ! I entered without ringing the bell, and found no one in the parlor. As I was about withdrawing, I spied Meta on the veranda. Her back was toward me. I called her ; but a little fountain bubbling near by prevented her hearing me. I advanced on tiptoe. She was sitting at a round table, and, leaning on her elbows before a large sheet of paper, she appeared plunged in a sort of ecstasy. I stretched my neck, and saw that she had drawn in ink a wreath of violets and forget-me-nots, and had traced within, in large capital letters, these four words, “The Baroness of Grüneck.”

This it was she was contemplating in such beatific meditation.

Did you ever take a Scotch shower-bath, madame ? Do you know how the unfortunate bather, who has just been plunged into hot water, feels, as the first ice-cold drops of the shower-bath above run down his shoulders ? It was a surprise of this kind that my amorous delirium underwent at that moment. I slunk away ; but, before leaving the parlor, I went to the easel whereon stood the nearly-finished portrait of *Maüschen*, and wrote on the frame, “She worshiped the stars and Baron Grüneck,” and then made off like a thief.

I was five days without setting again my feet into *Mon Nid*. I employed them making a boat-excursion on the lake with Harris. The day after our return to Geneva, I saw him enter my room like a cannon-ball. "Do you know the news?" cried he to me; "a porter has just been telling it to the door-keeper of the hotel. The house of the virtuous Holdenis has suspended payment; the property is in the hands of his creditors, and proceedings have already commenced against him. The worthy man was in the habit of speculating at the stock-exchange, and was unfortunate. The affair is a very suspicious one. They speak of enormous deficits, and it is said that the creditors will not get ten per cent. of their money back. Fortunately, you are not one of them. Where there is nothing, the devil himself cannot take anything."

At these words I remained petrified—dumb as marble, and surely I must have looked as white, for Harris staggered back. "What, Tony, my son!" cried he, "sweet child of Burgundy, has this unctuous sharper found a secret way to your indigent means?" and, bursting into a roaring laughter and rolling himself on the floor, "Oh, primitive candor!" cried he, "sweet union of souls, poetic sentiment, kingdom of celestial blue, I adore you! Oh, patriarchal virtue! are these the tricks you play?" He would have said more, but I was already down-stairs, running with all my might, with my heart full of rage. I was counting and recounting in my mind, on the way, the delicious pleasures that could be procured for two thousand crowns, and cast furious looks on all the passers-by.

I reached *Mon Nid* all out of breath. I bounded into M. Holdenis's study. He was alone ; his large folio Bible lay open before him. "This," cried he, as he laid his hand on the holy book, "this is the great, the only comforter !"

When Burgundian youths are angry, madame, they are not in the habit of weighing their words. "It is possible," I cried, in a voice breathless but thundering, "that rogues find consolations in the Bible ; but what, I ask, is then to console their dupes ?"

He did not get angry ; he contented himself with raising his eyes to heaven, as if to ask pardon for my blasphemous words, which were disrespectful only through his own hypocrisy ; then, coming toward me, despite my resistance, he took hold of both my hands. In reply to my reproaches and invectives, he had nothing but windy and moaning and whining explanations to give. He called on the Four Evangelists as witnesses that, in borrowing my ten thousand francs, he had only my good at heart, and meant to put my money in safety ; he confessed, however, that for the time being he had made use of it to pay a pressing note. He showed himself, meanwhile, thoroughly learned in casuistry, and most expert in the detection of motives. He gave me, next, a most verbose and obscure account of what he called his misfortune : mysterious enemies had plotted his ruin ; he had allowed himself to be taken in by an adventurer ; and an insolvent creditor had finally given him the death-blow ; ending with pitiable exclamations as to what would become now of his excellent wife and his poor children ! I

heard sobs in the next room. I thought I recognized Meta's voice. Meta, however, was henceforth to me nothing more but the Baroness Grüneck.

I took from my pocket the receipt M. Holdenis had given me, and, tearing it into four, I threw the pieces on the floor. "I will not add to your troubles," I cried, with bitter irony. "Your debt to me is henceforth a debt of honor; or, if you prefer it, you owe me nothing. Your conscience, or the Gospel, may decide."

With these words I left the sanctuary of virtue, determined never to return to it again. A few hours later I settled my bill at the hotel, and set off for Bâsle.

As the train moved away, a little man, made all of one piece, appeared on the platform, and, despite the objections of the employés around, jumped into the car next to mine. There are times when rheumatism has wings. This little man was no other than Baron Grüneck.

II.

You know, madame, by what process fishes are cleansed from the earthy taste they acquire in the river's slime: they are put into fresh water. I had to resort to quite a different treatment. I had conceived such a horror of virtue, that, to cleanse myself of the little I had left, I plunged into the very midst of the mire. I stopped at Baden, where I was served according to

my wishes. I met there women that cared very little about stars, and had never attempted to define paradise. They were kind to me; Fortune was not. I tried in vain to get my two thousand crowns back at the gaming-table; I lost, instead, the last feathers of my already much-plucked wings. More enraged than ever, I set out for Dresden, where I arrived in a state bordering on absolute destitution. I was so poor that I had to part with the few baubles I possessed, and a portion of my clothes. Full of spleen, sick of vice, but still bearing virtue a grudge, I swore enmity to all blue eyes, all crystal voices and unctuous smiles.

These feelings soon wore off, however. I was not long finding out that the whole world was *fatto come la nostra famiglia*, and that everywhere the tares grow up with the wheat. I found, by chance, lodgings with the best people in the world, who, it is true, had not much to say about the ideal. I paid them, the first month, a small sum in advance; the second, finding myself short, I confided to them my troubles. They had taken a liking to me, and not only comforted me and put me at my ease in regard to payments, but they even offered to board me, and to advance me money to refurnish my wardrobe; which kindness, however, I declined to accept. For several weeks I dined only about once every three days; the two others I lived on bread and water. This melancholy diet did not in the least affect my health. I was strong and robust, and, with a new confidence in the future, my former cheerfulness returned also. Although hunger kept me sometimes awake all night, I whistled as

merrily as a lark. I spent my days at the picture-gallery, where I was copying Rembrandt's protrait, which you have seen, and in which he has painted himself with a glass in his hand and his wife on his knees. I had taken it into my head that, on the day on which my copy was finished, I should find a purchaser for it. Faith removes mountains.

I think now of those weeks of distress, when I became acquainted with hunger—real hunger—as of a happy time that made an era in my life. Misery is a good nurse, whose meagre breasts furnish the sucklings a wholesome and nourishing milk. I delighted in my work; I had no longer any doubts about my vocation. It seemed to me that I had revealed myself to myself; that I had discovered what my will was, and that that will was worth something. In leaving the gallery, and finding myself again on the pavement of the street, in the midst of strangers who, no doubt, had breakfasted, and were on their way to their dinner, I persuaded myself that there was nothing more important in the universe than Rembrandt and his chiaroscuro. When my stomach called for food, I declared to it proudly that its cravings, like the dinners of others, were but vain chimeras; that my Uncle Gedeon did not exist, though he stupidly pretended he did; and that, in this world of illusions, the happiest shades are those which are not troubled with digestion.

The duration of my trials did not exceed my strength. One evening, on returning to my kennel, I found on my table two letters and a sealed package.

One of these letters was from M. Holdenis. He had obtained my address from Harris, to whom I had written, and told me, in the most solemn style, that, to the eternal confusion of all light-headed youths who make no scruple to brand with their suspicions true honor and piety, his perfect integrity had been universally established. He told me, next, that his creditors had subscribed to an agreement by which they had consented to a present twenty-per-cent. payment, in the confidence that M. Holdenis, with the help of God, would recover himself, and that all would be paid back to them, with interest. He added that, not having two thousand francs at his disposal, he had allowed his daughter to sacrifice in my favor a family jewel, which was fully worth that sum, and more, perhaps—so eager was he to prove to me that his former probity had suffered no alteration. This man and his way of understanding the payment of debts of honor appeared to me rather curious. I thought that to pay me thus with his daughter's trinkets showed very little delicacy indeed.

I opened the second letter; the writing was in a trembling hand, and contained the following communication :

“SIR: My poor father informs me that he is in your debt. He assures me that the bracelet, which you will find in the accompanying casket, is worth about the amount he owes you. At all hazards, I send you, unknown to him, all my jewels, beseeching you to dispose of them as you think proper, and to keep it a secret. I wish you happiness : to us it is forever lost.”

This note, which I thought rather touching, reconciled me somewhat with the recollection of *Maüschén*. I immediately carried the trinkets to an honest jeweler, who had already given me a fair price for my own baubles. He assured me that the bracelet was, at most, worth five hundred francs, and he estimated at about double that sum the accompanying neck-lace, ring, and medallion. I sold him the bracelet for the price he offered, and made again a package of the rest, which I sent back to Meta, with the few words, "Thanks—it was too much." To her hypocrite of a father I wrote the following lines : "Sir : I have had the trinket you sent me estimated at its full value. You owe me nothing more. My thoughtlessness acquits your probity of the rest of the debt." This done, and after having paid to my kind landlords my back rent, I asked of my philosophy the permission to treat myself for once to a good dinner at the Belvedere ; once does not establish a habit. After leaving the table, I took a long walk on the beautiful terrace of Bruhl, that borders the left shore of the Elbe. I asked myself, while walking, "Who is this Meta?" and I tried to define her character. I thought of her for several hours. The next day I banished all recollection of her from my thoughts ; I was an artist, and a native of Beaune.

My presentiments had meanwhile not deceived me. At the very hour when, palette in hand, I was giving the finishing touches to my copy, there came into the gallery a tall gentleman, whose countenance attracted my attention. He bordered on fifty, but his thick

and black hair, without the least touch of gray, kept the secret of his age. He had a noble appearance and a commanding aspect—the manners and air of the higher walks of life ; his eyes were deep and piercing, and his face had a grave and almost severe expression, which, however, was at times suddenly illuminated by the most engaging of smiles.

This scrutiny lasted but a moment. I returned to my picture, compared it with the original, and held secret confabulations with my conscience ; we were somewhat uneasy. Suddenly I heard a voice behind me say, “If this copy is for sale, I will buy it.” I turned quickly. The words had really been addressed to me, and that unexpected purchaser, which the Providence of beggars was thus sending me, was no other than the stranger with the grave face and charming smile. His name was M. de Mauserre, and he was no less a personage than the Minister of France at Dresden. We became so quickly acquainted, that the next day I was invited to dine at his house. A week later I began his portrait, which I completed in six weeks, and in honor of which he gave a state-dinner to the whole diplomatic corps. How I should have liked to see the good-man cooper of Beaune watch, from his obscure Burgundy home, the fortunes of his hair-brained son !—how courted, caressed, complimented he was on that great day ! The following spring I sent this famous portrait to the Paris Exposition. The public at large did not take much notice of it, but it was commended by artists, who prophesied that I was destined to make a mark. As the intelligent

M. Holdenis had said, there is a beginning to everything.

God bless my uncle Gedeon! It was through him that I went to Dresden, where I learned German, and met M. de Mauserre. Although this distinguished statesman does not play the principal part in the story I am relating to you, I must stop a moment to tell you about him, for I feel under the greatest obligations to him. I believe that long and fast friendships arise less from similarity of character and situation in life than from a certain conformity of thought and judgment. We are very good friends, madame, you and I, and yet we resemble each other very little. I often asked myself how it was that M. de Mauserre should have taken a liking to, and admitted into his intimacy, so half-polished a fellow as I, so ignorant of everything that is not strictly connected with his profession; one who lived and thought at hap-hazards, and never reflected seriously upon anything. When I questioned him on the subject, he answered that, apart from my talent for painting, which had at once struck him as auspicious, he had found in me what he called a good mind. He meant by that, I suppose, something of that blunt common-sense which preserves us from foolish contempt and imbecile conceit. He himself possessed a very superior mind; he had traveled much, had observed much, had read much, and his experience of life, as well as his reading, had been brought into the service of his keenness of insight and natural good judgment. One felt in him an intelligence that had been well fed, and had digested all.

The superior man is he who, in addition to understanding well his own business, knows also something besides. M. de Mauserre was such a one. His profession was to him a matter of choice and worship. He used to say that diplomacy is an art that involves four others: the art of gaining information, which requires eyes and ears; the art of giving information, the first condition of which is to know how to place oneself in other people's situation; the art of advising, the most delicate of all; and, finally, the art of negotiating, where character must come to the assistance of judgment. I think he excelled in all these four parts. His diplomatic messages stood in high appreciation in the cabinet; he read me some, which, I thought, were masterpieces of style.

Whether from a feeling of timidity, or the desire to be agreeable, many diplomatists tell their government only what will please it; they prefer to deceive rather than to cause displeasure. M. de Mauserre would have considered it dishonorable to dissemble in politics and conceal useful truths merely on account of their disagreeableness; but he knew how to present them with so much art that he made them acceptable. He carried into his negotiations with foreign ministers the same respect for others which he had for himself; he looked upon humbug as a means that soon gave out, showed a meagre mind, and killed authority in the end, and that the great secret is to persuade without having resort to falsehood, which, according to him, was a bridge for asses. Nothing shrivels up the mind more than the fear of being duped, and it is the

malady of many politicians who in their excess of caution often miss precious opportunities. M. de Mauserre did not lightly put trust in people, but he was capable of a prompt and generous confidence, of which he told me he had scarcely ever had occasion to repent. This generosity of sentiment was communicated to his way of thinking. He looked on things from a high standpoint; he believed in the power of general ideas. Whilst admitting the fortuitousness of the things of this world, he had sufficient esteem for the human species to believe that small accidents and minor intrigues did not explain all its history; that public opinion was the true sovereign of the world; that all great events are the victory or the defeat of an idea: thus he held in equal contempt all empirics and utopians. He liked to put them on their hobbies while talking to them. It is to these conversations that my mind owes its culture; they enlightened me on various things, and inspired me with the desire to correct my shameful ignorance, and take to reading.

Our talks took gradually a more intimate character, and were no longer confined to politics or painting. M. de Mauserre began telling me of his own affairs. I felt flattered in becoming the confidant of a man whose talents, superiority of mind, fortune, and situation in life paved for him so sure a way to success, and was not a little surprised to find that the shrewdest, the most experienced of men—men who give the best advice in other people's affairs—are often the worst managers of their own.

M. de Mauserre had been a widower for seven or eight years, and began to get tired of single life. The regard and appreciation he was held in by society no longer satisfied him, and he longed for the family circle. He had let slip a number of opportunities, because his heart did not respond to any of them. Happy the ambitious who find in their worldly successes all they crave ! Happy, also, the men of pleasure who seek for nothing but amusement ! Those who ask in this life for work or diversion only, are sure to find it ; but woe to him who owns to a soul ! It is the thing that least of all finds employment in this world. M. de Mauserre was neither a man of pleasure nor of mere ambition. He united with a serious mind a warm heart—a circumstance which rather complicates matters. Constant in his attachments, passion with him proved stronger than prudence, and led him to commit so inconsiderate an act as to be thrown out of his career thereby, and become the object of universal blame. So true is it that what is best in us becomes often the source of our greatest troubles.

I had known him about three months, and saw him almost every day, when I thought I perceived some alteration in his mood. In the midst of our conversations he would often drop into a long silence, from which he could not arouse himself without effort. I at first attributed these preoccupations to some state affairs that did not move according to his wishes, but he soon enlightened me on the subject. He took me, one evening, into his study, of which, having first carefully and with an air of mystery locked the folding-

door, he next proceeded to tell me that, having full confidence in my friendship, and being on the point of coming to a most serious determination, he wished to discuss the question with me.

Then, rising and walking up and down the room, he confessed to me, with many deep sighs, that he was desperately in love with the best, the most charming of women, who was in the power of a brutal husband, who treated her shamefully. He was sure of being loved in return ; but up to that day he had obtained no favors, because the lady (and this was his own expression) had a soul straight as an arrow ; that she would never stoop to a falsehood, and, whatever reason of complaint she might have against her tyrant, would never betray or deceive him. He added, that he loved her too passionately himself to consent to share her with a husband ; he meant to have her all his own, and had no alternative left but to run away with her. "Fortunately," continued he, "the man who married her and makes her so miserable comes from a country that sanctions divorces. After the noise this elopement will necessarily make, he will, no doubt, hasten to vindicate his liberty, and she will become my wife.

"M. de Mauserre, individually, will be made a happy man thereby, no doubt," I said ; "but what will become of the Minister of France ?"

He held down his head awhile, then spoke.

"Well, yes—I shall have to renounce a career I love. I shall ask for an indefinite leave of absence ; reasons for it will not be wanting. I shall allege the state of my health. The fact is, that I was sick last

year, and the physicians told me that the climate of Germany did not agree with me ; that if I remained in Dresden I made myself liable to a relapse. Things cannot always be conciliated ; life is so fashioned that we must choose for ourselves. Happiness cannot be given ; it has to be bought."

Thereupon he praised to me, in the warmest terms, the beauty, the charms, the various qualities of mind and heart of the idol to whom he was ready to sacrifice both his position and fortune. He did not name her ; but, from the portrait he made of her, I recognized unmistakably a creole of French origin, a Madame de N——, married to a diplomatist, who, *blasé* about her charms, sacrificed her to unworthy prostitutes with whom he lived publicly. I had met this beautiful victim of conjugal life at the theatre ; everybody at Dresden admired and pitied her. M. de Mauserre had introduced me to her. It seemed to me that he had somewhat overrated the qualities of her mind, which was rather mediocre than otherwise. As for her beauty, it could not be surpassed ; its brilliancy was truly marvelous, and it was accompanied by such languid, lazy grace, that it is no wonder it bewitched the still young heart of the fifty-years-old minister plenipotentiary.

I spoke that evening, madame, like one of the seven sages of Greece. It is so easy to be wise for others ! I represented to M. de Mauserre that he was about to commit a great folly ; that follies carried with them long regrets and dire repentances ; that passion soon wears out, and that, when his should have cooled down,

he would wonder that he could have made such sacrifices for it; that, to a man of his temperament, a useless, aimless life would in the end become intolerable; that his unoccupied faculties would torture him; that only willful recluses, dreamers, and poets, could find their happiness in irregular conditions of life; but that men born for action and government had to submit to the rules of society, the same as a whist-player is held to respect the rules of the game if he would not be excluded from the set.

"You may be happy one year—perhaps two, at most," I said to him; "the third you will discover that your happiness is that of the galley-slave; that you have a cannon-ball fastened to your foot, and that, while cursing it, your loyalty obliges you to drag it along with you to the end."

He interrupted me to explain that he did not mean to bid an everlasting farewell to affairs; that I talked as if he were going to settle down forever to an irregular course of life; that, on the contrary, he meant to legalize the situation as soon as possible; that, if he were once married, his unapproved mode of procedure would soon be forgotten, and the services he had rendered, and could still render, would alone be remembered.

"But what assurance have you, sir," I replied, "that everything will happen according to your fancy, and that circumstances and men will prove as obliging as you suppose? Husbands are terrible men! Are you quite sure that this one will oblige you by claiming a divorce? Who knows but that he may prove of a

thwarting disposition, and will prefer to his liberty the sweets of a long vengeance?"

He fought my objections down inch by inch, yet not without repeated sighs, and, as I insisted, he put an end to my remonstrances by saying that the passions in advanced life were the most violent of all; that he had not the strength to resist his, and that he had that very morning written to the minister to request him to appoint a successor to his place. It is thus with all people who ask for advice. They know perfectly well beforehand what they intend to do, and stick to their purpose, despite all opinions to the contrary. You have but to approve of their course.

M. de Mauserre was so determined in his resolution, that all efforts on my side to dissuade him from it were wrecked against his will—a will all led astray, delighting in its error and persisting in its chimera. The minister fought strongly against a decision the motives of which he was far from guessing, for he believed in the health-reasons which M. de Mauserre had alleged. He begged him to have but a little patience, assuring him that, if the climate of Dresden did not agree with his health, he would soon be called to fill an important post in some of the Southern capitals. I, on my side, renewed the assault, but was repulsed with loss.

In the mean time his plans wellnigh failed through Madame de N——'s own objections, who felt herself tied to her duty and tormented by her own scruples. She considered herself unworthy—the modest, delicate soul—of the sacrifice he was about to make.

But she was at last obliged to yield to his desperate supplications, which refused to listen to reason.

How can a woman long resist a man whom she loves, when he declares that he will blow out his brains, and she knows that he will keep his word? M. de Mauserre announced to me one day, with a triumphant air, that his resignation was accepted, and that all was in readiness for the carrying out of his plans. A week later he set out for the Springs of Gastein, where Madame de N—— soon joined him ; and, two months after, a letter dated from Sorrento informed me that there was one more happy couple under the sky of Naples. The same letter invited me to come shortly to Florence, to paint the portrait of the most adorable and most adored of women. You may imagine what excitement this adventure created in Dresden : it was pitilessly condemned by the good sense of some and the jealousy of others.

The follies of the wise are the best lessons for fools. If the conversation of M. de Mauserre had enlightened my mind on many questions, his last reckless step caused me to make the most salutary reflections. I determined to prove to the world that on certain occasions an artist could manage his boat better, perhaps, than a diplomatist. Up to that time I had been pretty much subject to my caprices ; my will suddenly showed them a royal countenance, and talked to them as a sovereign—like Louis XIV., with spurs on his heels and whip in hand, reducing his parliament to reason. I left Dresden toward the end of winter, intending to return. I like the city, and have left there a few good

friends. Immediately after my return to Paris I wrote to my uncle Gedeon to look up for himself another son and successor ; then I started for Italy, stopping on the way at Beaune, where I spent two days with my father. He called me a fool, but my well-filled purse made him open his eyes. But, to satisfy his conscience, he would snub me, nevertheless. These scolding fathers are a wise institution. The man who has never eaten any but white bread at his home will always find the stranger's bread bitter.

M. de Mauserre was right in settling down in Florence. It is the most tolerant city in the world toward adventurers, the most hospitable toward illegal situations ; the spirit of the Decameron still dwells there. I found my traveling pigeons in the full enjoyment of their honeymoon. I had proved, however, a better prophet than I could have wished. The husband had given a deaf ear to all the propositions they had plied him with: insinuations, threats, promises, all the springs which had been made to work on him, proved useless. This stubborn Menelaus was fully resolved not to ask for a divorce: he did not in fact, like the other, think of conquering his wife ; all he wanted was to prevent her from marrying Paris.

"Much good may it do him!" said to me M. de Mauserre ; "he cannot prevent us from being happy together."

The portrait of Madame de N——, whom, with your permission, I shall henceforth call Madamede Mauserre, was soon on a fair way. Excuse my boasting of it ; it made my fortune. Its success at the Exhibition was

a perfect infatuation: orders, fortune, reputation—I owe it everything; but I confess that the miraculous beauty of the model had still more share in this triumphant success than the talent of the painter.

It was while studying the beauty of the model, in order to do it full justice, that we became friends. I have told you that Madame de Mauserre had a very ordinary mind—poor land, which, even cultivated, would scarcely, I think, have proved very productive. Her spelling was peculiar, and she had read hardly anything but the volumes of the Blue Library and the “*Imitation of Christ*”—works which were ever new to her; she could read them for the hundredth time, and still fancy it was the first. This too candid statement may injure her in your esteem, madame—you who have so many acquirements, and have read so much. You do not like women that do not read. I assure you, however, that if she failed to be intelligent, a closer acquaintance with her made up for that deficiency. She had an inventive heart. The delicacy and vivacity of her sympathies made her ingenious in discovering the secret desires of those around her. This kind of intelligence is, it seems to me, sufficient for a woman, when, into the bargain, she is as beautiful as sunlight. Her sincerity was admirable; her soul, frank as a willow wand, was incapable of dissembling or disguising anything. She gave herself candidly out for what she was, and did not think of it as of a virtue, because she fancied that everybody was like her. Thus she was often the dupe of others. But I have since had occasion to think still less of women who are never taken in.

Her only fault was a creole laziness, which she carried to an incredible degree. I shall make you shudder when I tell you that it cost her an effort to get up before noon, and that, with the exception of a little tapestry, all finger or head work frightened her. The least walk was a terrible undertaking for her. But it is only the lazy people who complain of weariness that are blameworthy. Madame de Mauserre never complained of weariness: she could sit whole hours coiled up in a corner of her sofa, her fan in her hand, speaking or not speaking (it was all the same to her), in love with her idleness, which allowed her to busy herself with her thoughts. To exist, was enough for her; she was happy in feeling herself alive and beloved. Some fairy, no doubt, catching one day a feather that had fallen from the wing of a turtle-dove and was floating in the air, rocked by the breezes of the spring, converted that feather into a woman; this woman was Madame de Mauserre. She had preserved all the softness and airiness of that feather; and, as formerly rocked by the wind, she allowed herself to be rocked by life.

I must add, however, that on certain occasions her exquisite kindness triumphed over her laziness. When the question was, to be agreeable or to oblige a friend, she spared neither words nor steps. She could also move about and exert herself to serve the poor. I have seen her, in Florence, climb twice a day to the garret of a pretended blind man, who had imposed on her kindness with his effrontery, and I could never persuade her that the scamp could see as well as her-

self. There was in her intermittent spells of feverish charity something like a desire of expiation: she seemed to say to the people she assisted, "You owe me no gratitude, for I have so much to be forgiven." I succeeded, I think, in expressing something of this in her portrait.

M. and Madame de Mauserre would have wished to keep me near them; but that was out of the question. I promised, in leaving them, to pay them a visit every year, and I kept my word. I found them, the following spring, proud and delighted over the birth of a little girl, that promised to be as beautiful as her mother. M. de Mauserre's joy was nevertheless mixed with sadness. The thought that the law forbade him to recognize the child as his own was truly painful to him. At the end of the same year Madame de Mauserre was attacked by the smallpox, which nearly carried her off. Her husband spent many weary days in mortal anxiety. I saw her during her convalescence. The malady had proved indulgent toward her; it left her still one of the handsomest women of Europe, although her rose-and-lily complexion—that rare flower of beauty which has dazzled the world and justified all the follies that have been committed for its sake—had lost its incomparable brilliancy. I do not know what M. de Mauserre's feelings were on the subject. He tried to read mine in my eyes, but these were discreet.

The year following I left Florence less satisfied. I apprehended that M. de Mauserre, whose mind had taken a sober turn, was beginning to regret the bar-

gain he had made with Destiny. Great events were brewing in Europe; they interested him much, and his foresight could predict their consequences. He blamed the policy of the French Government, whose agents, he thought, gave it wrong information and still worse advice. It was the continuous theme of all his conversations. He would get excited over it, and suddenly cry out, in a bitter tone: "But I forget that I have no longer a voice in affairs; I forget that I have ceased to be anything." I compared him to a brave war-horse, who had been put on the retired list before the time, and who hears the roaring of the cannon; he kicks against the thill that holds him back. Madame de Mauserre had no idea of what was going on within him, for he affected in her presence a cheerfulness that deceived her.

The next summer he appeared to me reconciled with his fate. To give a diversion to his regrets, he had undertaken to write the political history of Florence, and he employed his time in making researches in the archives. This work brought him back his serenity. I dare not affirm that he was still in love with his wife; but he felt himself united by an indissoluble tie to the mother of his child. She, on her side, had vowed to him a profound attachment—an attachment mixed with admiration and absolute trust—which was only to die with her. In short, never were people more married than this man and woman, who were not: which does not prevent the mayors and their badges from being useful institutions. We may say what we please; those who invented marriage knew what they were about.

A few months later we agreed to meet in Spain, where I intended to study the god of painting, Velasquez, the most complete painter that ever existed. I sketched, at Madrid, a picture which has created some sensation, and which represents the last Moorish king, Boabdil, bidding farewell to Granada. At the moment of parting, M. de Mauserre expressed to me his desire to see France again, and establish himself in the country-seat he possessed near Cremieux, a beautiful domain called Les Charmilles. There was, however, one obstacle in the way: he had from his first marriage an only daughter, who had married, seven years before, the Count d'Arci, whose château was situated about five kilometres from Les Charmilles.

"My son-in-law is a very estimable man," said he to me, "but a little stiff in his principles. He has never forgiven me what he still calls my last youthful prank, and has forbidden my daughter any further intercourse with me. He has since allowed her to write to me, but on the condition that she would never name Madame de Mauserre in her letters, and that she should entirely ignore her existence. It would be hard for me to live in their neighborhood without seeing them, and it would be still harder for my wife. One can make up one's mind to solitude, but not to isolation. If you could succeed in humanizing a little the severe virtue of my son-in-law, and bring about friendly relations between us, you would fulfill the dearest wish of Madame de Mauserre, and I should be under the greatest obligation to you."

I left, intrusted with this delicate commission. I

found in Madame d'Arci a worthy lady, who favored my suit from the very first. She resembled her father, but her father in repose. M. de Mauserre was a sage, with a romantic imagination. He had bestowed upon his daughter his wisdom only, and kept his romance and flightiness for himself; that is to say, she possessed neither the brilliant nor the dangerous sides of his mind. Hers was a temper most equable, a most uniform reason, an excellent heart, and a cold imagination. Although she had a quick intelligence, she was given to perpetual astonishments—probably because there are so many things in human life that escape reason. Adventures were incomprehensible to her—perfect Chinese riddles. She would say: “Is it possible! How could they do it! What were they about! Had they lost their senses?”—she knew one could not exactly lose these, but she had such a kind heart that she was willing to forgive without understanding. Her father's conduct was to her an unfathomable abyss. Still, she could not help loving this prodigal father, and would have willingly exclaimed, in the words of the Gospel, “Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him!” However, in marrying M. d'Arci she had made over to him her will, and was wholly governed by his advice, which she respected like a command. It was to him she sent me.

He did not receive me very well at first. He had a fine mind, with a somewhat unintelligent look, a brusque manner of speaking, a scolding temper, a caustic good sense which spared nothing and no one, and he was in the habit of calling things by their right name:

on the whole, the best fellow in the world, who spent his life doing good while grumbling. He began by declaring to me that his father-in-law was the most absurd man in the universe, and that he would not allow his wife to see again so foolish a father—who would probably give her as good advice as he had given himself. I answered him that he did not know M. de Mauserre ; that one was not a fool for having committed one folly ; that wisdom consisted in committing but one. I represented to him that when, through the running off the rails on some railroad-line, a big accident occurs, one was pretty sure of traveling safely on it for a long time. In short, I managed him so well, and pleaded so warmly Madame de Mauserre's cause, that he grew tame. He promised me that, as soon as M. de Mauserre was at Les Charmilles, he would go to see him, and matters might afterward take their own course. I did not ask for more, for I was quite sure that at their first interview Madame de Mauserre and Madame d'Arci would be friends ; that these two straightforward souls would soon recognize and esteem each other. I hastened to announce the result of my commission to M. de Mauserre, and his wife responded in the most grateful and warmest terms.

From Arci I hastened to Beaune, where I had been summoned by my father, who was in a dying condition. He had been suffering for some time from a disease of the heart, which all at once had made alarming progress. He treated me no longer as a fool. "Tony," said he, embracing me, "I do not ask

you if you have any talent ; I don't understand anything about it ; but I should like to know the state of your affairs."

The rather brilliant statement I was able to make satisfied him completely, and he confessed that once in my life I happened to be in the right against him. But if he was satisfied with me, I was far from being so with his condition, for his strength was visibly on the decline. He was soon no longer able to leave his bed, where his rest was troubled by insupportable suffering. For two whole weeks I did not leave his bedside. He scolded me no longer, and had almost become tender ; and as he was in possession of all his faculties, he would give me, keeping my hands in his, the most pressing advice, the wisdom of which was quite superior to his humble fortunes. He was fond of repeating to me that our passions were our greatest enemies ; that the most essential thing was to be able to command them ; that it was easy to acquire property, but hard to keep it ; and that the discipline of the human will was the secret of durable conquests and long happiness.

One night, as he was again upon this theme, a neighboring cock began to crow. "Tony," said my father, "I have always loved the crowing of the cock. It announces the day, and chases away the phantoms of the night. This sound resembles a war-cry ; it admonishes us to spend our lives in fighting against ourselves. Tony, every time that you hear the cock crow, remember that it is the only music that your father ever liked." On the following night, at the

same hour, the same cock uttered a sonorous cry. My poor father tried to raise his head, made me a sign with his finger, and, with an effort to smile, he died. Madame, I have, since that, never heard the cock crow without remembering my dying father and his last injunctions. You will see, by-and-by, how needful they were, and how fortunate for me to have remembered them. We do not know the value of what we possess till we have lost it. I devoted a few days to my affliction, which was profound, and to the care of my affairs, which task had never been more distasteful to me, and I returned to Paris, where a number of unfinished pictures awaited me. I was possessed either by the devil or by Velasquez, and had my gloom to conquer. I worked the whole winter through with such perseverance, that in the spring I was completely spent. Early in April I received a letter from M. de Mauserre, who wrote to me that he had seen his son-in-law and his daughter. The making-up had been so complete, that M. d'Arci, who intended making great repairs at his château, had allowed himself to be persuaded to give it up to the masons and to come and spend the summer with his wife at Les Charmilles. "You alone are wanting to complete the happy circle," added he. "Come quickly; you can work at your Boabdil here, and begin the portrait of Madame d'Arci."

I accepted the invitation, and, for a little change, I took my road via Cologne, the Rhine, and Switzerland, which was, to be sure, the truant's road. It proved a happy idea, however, since I had the honor

to be introduced to you at Bonn, and spent a day with you on that charming terrace where you will probably read this. It is one of the days of my life that I have marked with a white stone.

I found, at Mayence, a letter from M. de Mauserre, which said that, since I had taken the longest road, he would punish me for it by giving me an errand in Geneva. His dear little girl Lulu (she was called Lucy, like her mother), who was in her fifth year, was becoming more self-willed every day, and was much in need of a governess. This governess was to be very honest, very learned, very sensible, gentle and firm at the same time—in short, nothing less than perfection. He thought that such a wonder could be more easily found in Protestant countries, and he had written to that effect to a Genevese clergyman whose acquaintance he had made in Rome. He wondered why he had not received a reply, and wished me to inquire into the cause of his silence.

My heart did not beat a whit faster as I walked through the streets of Geneva. I scarcely remembered the existence of Meta. Six years make some changes in a man. As a punishment for my forgetfulness, I chanced to meet M. Holdenis at the station. His faded hat and threadbare clothes were a sad comment upon the state of his affairs. He had the cowering look of a ruined gambler. I bowed to him, but he did not seem to recognize me. I forthwith sought the clergyman M. de Mauserre had directed me to, and acquitted myself of my errand. This clergyman, who had been written to twice and had given no answer, explained to

me, in a hesitating tone, that with all his desire to oblige amiable people whom he esteemed much and would like to serve, and notwithstanding the liberal salary that was offered, he had not yet been able to find any one to send to M. de Mauserre; "probably," he added, looking at me askance, "you can guess the reason why."

"You are acquainted with M. and Madame de Mauserre," I replied. "Did you ever meet, in your pastoral career, many households more honorable and more united?"

"That is exactly the difficulty," said he, half in earnest, half smiling. "I feel some scruple in sending an honest young girl to people who love each other more faithfully than if they were married. These are virtues the example of which is very dangerous for the young."

He assured me, however, that, if some good opportunity presented itself, he would not allow it to escape; but I saw very well that he would not seek any. I took my leave thereupon, and whom should I meet in coming from the house? Why, the most splenetic of Harrises! who, having not yet succeeded in discovering the place where amusement could be found, had put off his departure from Geneva all these years, and from one day to another, and had not budged from the Hôtel des Bergues. He embraced me yawning, and yawned while congratulating me on what he called my stunning *débuts*. He declared that his incurable *ennui* meant to empty forthwith two bottles of champagne in honor of my young glory. We entered a *café*.

While answering his healths, I related to him where I came from, where I was going to, and that I was in search of a governess.

“What salary?” asked he.

“Four thousand francs, payable quarterly, with expectation of increase. Have you a mind to present yourself?”

“No,” replied he, laconically; “but I may have some good subject to recommend.”

I answered him that I considered him competent in all matters, and especially in the choice of a governess, and we spoke of something else. As I was taking leave of him: “You did not inquire about the little mouse?” said he; “and you were right. The poor thing succumbed to the grief of having been treacherously abandoned by you. But perhaps she died only from an indigestion of poetry—or from having recited too often ‘The King of Thule’—or from a fish-bone, perhaps: Who knows, indeed, what women die of?”

“Is it a half jest, or a whole one?” asked I, not without some emotion, however.

“I am the least jesting of men,” he replied. “As for the old fox, he wears greasy clothes, to work upon the feelings of his creditors. It is said that for some time he has been hiding moneys in woolen stockings.”

With these words he yawned again, and turned upon his heels.

Two days after I was at Les Charmilles, where I found happy people and cheerful faces. M. d’Arci had even stopped grumbling; he was completely under the charm of the fine manners and cultivated mind

of his father-in-law, whom up to that time he had scarcely known, and of whom he had formed an erroneous idea.

"You are the king of friends," said Madame de Mauserre to me, as soon as we were alone. "I could not forgive myself for setting my husband at variance with his children. You have put my conscience at rest." To express her gratitude to me, she had given me the finest apartment of her very beautiful château; my windows commanded a magnificent view. M. de Mauserre had put in repair an old, half-ruined tower, which stood at the extremity of the garden, and had converted the first story into a charming studio, ornamented with panoplies, fine hangings, and antique chests. I found myself over ears in clover.

However, there was one mar-joy in the house. Notwithstanding her superb, jet-black eyes, Mademoiselle Lulu was at certain times a real wild horse—a perfect little devil. When the fit was on her, she would become imperious, passionate, and so violent in her anger as to throw anything that would come into her hand at anybody's head. They spoiled her fearfully. Madame de Mauserre preached a good deal, threatened sometimes, but without ever carrying any menace into effect. She would say to her, "Lulu, if you break another glass in the conservatory you shall be put to bed." Lulu broke three more glasses, and was not put to bed. If they tried to punish her by depriving her of some of her playthings, she would fall into such a terrible fury, followed by spasms, that her mother was frightened, and let her be. Madame d'Arci

had too much sense to approve of so much indulgence, but this same discreet good sense forbade her interfering in the matter. If I ever have any children, madame, I shall not often promise them a whipping; but when they shall have deserved one, God help me, but they shall get it! Promise and hold back won't do!

M. de Mauserre, who felt that Lulu's education needed looking after, was very much mortified at the news brought from Geneva. He was on the point of going himself to Paris in search of a governess, when I received from Harris the following note:

“MY DEAR GREAT MAN: I was much flattered by the confidence you put in me. Wishing to make it good, I set about in quest of the person in demand, and I think I have found the very thing. She is a charming and very capable person, whom you can recommend in all security of conscience. As you gave me free leave, I arranged matters in the name of M. de Mauserre, and the bargain is concluded. My *protégée* will set out to-morrow by the afternoon train; let your friends send a carriage to meet her at Ambérieux, where she will arrive at six in the evening. You need not thank me; you know I am all at your service.

“YOUR OLD HARRIS.”

This most unexpected letter put me in a strange embarrassment. An American who does not know what to do with himself is capable of anything. I was afraid that this pretended instructress of Harris's might

be some wench he wanted to get rid of, or that it was himself, perhaps ; for he was just the fellow to sacrifice his mustache for the pleasure of mystifying a friend. I regretted that I did not acquaint him with the real situation of the parties, and trembled lest his joke might turn out an insult. Unfortunately, his letter reaching me at noon, and the stranger it announced setting on her way one or two hours later at most, made it impossible for me to parry the blow. I determined to tell all to M. de Mauserre. He took the matter very cheerfully.

“Let your friend amuse himself, if he likes, at our expense,” said he ; “if he sends us an adventuress, we will soon know how to receive her.”

“But if she is an honest person,” hastened to put in Madame de Mauserre, “let us try to find it out soon, and take care not to hurt her feelings by improper questions and impertinent looks.”

“Oh, you, my dear, have never yet hurt any one’s feelings !” he replied. “You would find some good in the very devil himself, were he to present himself before you with sleeves out at elbows. I predict one thing, and that is, that this person, whether an adventuress or not, will be kissed by you before you even ask her name. I believe in the instinct of children. It is Mademoiselle Lulu who will tell us with whom we have to do. I mean to regulate my opinion upon hers.”

We ended by bantering on the subject of the mysterious unknown ; and M. d’Arci, who had a ready hand at sketching, made a caricature that represented her

entrance at Les Charmilles: a Columbine, with rather free movements, darting into the drawing-room and pirouetting with Lulu in her arms; and from the mouth of Madame de Mauserre the words, "Truly there is much good in her!"

The carriage left at three o'clock for Ambérieux, and in the evening we were all gathered in the drawing-room awaiting its return. It was very windy; a storm was coming on, and we heard at the same time the distant rolling of thunder and the pawing of the horses' feet in the court-yard. The door opened. The unknown made her appearance, wrapped in a large brown cloak that fell down to her heels, and the hood of which almost entirely concealed her face. She advanced with rather uncertain steps, and threw back the hood. To my great surprise, I saw emerge from it a face that I knew—two eyes that had cost me two thousand crowns or more.

If men were honest, they would confess that in all such encounters their first impulse is to consult their self-love. I questioned mine, and it answered that my youth had no need of blushing for having been in love at the age of chimeras with the person before me. She had changed somewhat; she was no longer a young girl, but a woman. Her cheeks were less full, and I rather thought it was for the better. Her look came, as it were, from a greater distance, and was as if impregnated with a gentle melancholy. She had seen many sad things during those six years, and had preserved them in the depth of her eyes.

She did not recognize me. I was seated in the

shadow, concealed by a large portfolio in which I was drawing something or other. She was very much confused ; either the storm or this meeting with strangers frightened her, for she trembled like a leaf. I was about to rise to come to her assistance, when Madame de Mauserre, whose heart was always quick in such matters, anticipated me, and, to justify the prophecy of her husband, met her kindly, and in her indolent voice said, "You are welcome among us, mademoiselle ; try to feel at home." Then, putting her arm around her, she was going to lead her to the dining-room ; but Meta assured her that she was not hungry.

"Well, then, until you feel some appetite, sit down," said Madame de Mauserre ; and, calling Lulu, she added, "We have here a little girl who will need all your indulgence."

Lulu was at that moment in a detestable humor. She had persisted in staying awake to see her governess, and had been fighting hard against sleep for more than an hour. You know how amiable sleepy children are when they will not go to sleep. When the stranger came in, she stepped back to the farthest end of the room and leaned against the wall, with her hands behind her back, and with a look that said, "This is the enemy !" Her mother called her in vain ; she would not budge.

Mademoiselle Holdenis, bending toward her, held out her arms : "Are you afraid of me ? Do I look so terrible ?" But Lulu turned her back on her and faced the wall. Meta took off her cloak and gloves, and played the first bars of a sonata of Mozart. I have

never known but two women who understood Mozart, and she was one of the two. I recommend her to you, madame, as a very accomplished musician. Lulu felt the charm. She crept slowly toward the piano, and, when her governess stopped playing :

“Play on,” said she, in a tone of reproach.

“No, I am tired.”

“Will you play to-morrow ?”

“Perhaps — if Lulu is a good girl,” replied Meta.

With these words she sat down in an arm-chair, without appearing to care any further for the child’s approbation. Lulu, piqued at this indifference, said : “You are my governess ; do you think I shall mind you ?”

“Perhaps.”

“Do you want me to kiss you ?”

“There have happened in the world more wonderful things than that.”

More and more puzzled, Lulu came up to her and pulled her dress. Meta turned round, opened her arms, and the next moment, as if overcome by a sweet magnetism, the child was nestled in her lap, and, looking into her face, said, “What have you got there, on the left cheek ?”

“It is called a beauty-spot.”

“And yet you are not pretty, like mamma !” replied Lulu. “You are good, though.”

In less than three minutes she was fast asleep, and her governess looked at her smiling. They formed a pretty group. I kept a sketch of it. Meta rose to

carry the child to her bed. Madame de Mauserre wanted to prevent her, and told her it was the nurse's business. "Pray, let me, madame," replied she, in her sweet voice; "they will wake her in undressing her. I had better do it myself."

She went out with her burden, followed by Madame de Mauserre, who said to me, in passing: "She is lovely! Write quickly to your friend, and thank him for the treasure he has sent us."

A quarter of an hour later she returned with a letter Mademoiselle Holdenis had brought, and which ran as follows:

"MOST HONORED SIR: Reverses of fortune, and the difficulty of providing for my numerous family, oblige me to part with the dearest treasure in the world. It is a very cruel trial that God imposes on me. I never thought that my poor Meta would some day be obliged to earn her living; I had hoped for a happier future for her. Permit a father to recommend this poor dear child warmly to your kindness, and to that of your worthy wife. You will appreciate, I am sure, the nobleness of her character and the elevation of her sentiments. She will teach German to your dear little girl; she will also teach her to cast her eyes upward, and to prefer to all worldly goods that supreme ideal which is the nourishment of the heart and the bread of the soul. Please accept, honored sir, the respects of your most humble and obedient servant,

BENEDICT HOLDENIS."

In giving me the letter to read, M. de Mauserre underscored with his finger the three words, "*Your worthy wife*," and whispered to me, "We shall have disagreeable explanations to make. Your friend ought to have spared us this trouble in making them himself."

"How could he explain," I said, "what he did not know?"

I handed the letter to M. d'Arci, who made a face, and said: "She is a German, she is called Meta, and she worships the ideal. *Sauve qui peut!*" Then turning to Madame de Mauserre: "You have hurt her feelings, madame, in offering her any supper. Can you imagine that she eats and drinks? That's for savages like ourselves!"

"I tell you she is charming!" replied Madame de Mauserre; "I love her already with all my heart!"

"What I like in her," said Madame d'Arci, "is that she is not vain. Another would have wished to leave her water-proof at the door."

"If you ask me my opinion," said M. de Mauserre, "I must say that I regret Columbine and her pirouettes. The charming Meta makes me think of that woman of whom it was said that her fine eyes and beautiful complexion served only to show off her ugliness."

"Are you quite sure that she is ugly?" interrupted I. "Beware of the first glance! I have known people who, in arriving at Rome, thought the city frightful; they were still there eight months later, and could not get away from it."

"It is certain," said M. d'Arci, in his bantering way, "that we have as yet only seen the suburbs. Have you been admitted into the Coliseum?"

"Stop this!" replied Madame de Mauserre, giving him a tap on the mouth with her fan, "otherwise we shall ask Mademoiselle Holdenis to give you a few lessons in ideality."

"My son-in-law is right," said M. de Mauserre. "I believe, as he does, that Tony has special reasons for defending the charms of Lulu's governess.—Tony, will you please inform us in what the joke of your friend Harris consists?"

"In this," I replied, "that, unknown to me, he undertook to make me do a good deed of which I ought to have bethought myself. M. Holdenis, in a moment of embarrassment, borrowed some money from me, and his daughter sold a bracelet to pay me back. Such a fine trait surely deserved a reward."

"And, since you have become rich, you have no doubt returned her ten bracelets for the one?"

"No, indeed! There is no necessity of teaching girls to pay their fathers' debts."

"Oh, that settles the question!" said he, laughing. "This is no lover's speech."

"Poor thing!" continued Madame de Mauserre, whom this story had much moved. "Poor thing! What candor there is in her eye! How her beautiful soul shines through her face! Just now, as I left her a moment to call the nurse, I found her, as I came back, kneeling on the floor by Lulu's bed. She was praying very fervently! Indeed, it was touching. As she saw

me, she blushed to the very roots of her hair, as if I had surprised her in mortal sin.—But, now I think of it, she is a Protestant ; what catechism will she teach Lulu ?”

“Mohammedan or Buddhist, I care not !” replied M. de Mauserre. “If her catechism teaches that it is wrong to break the glasses in my conservatory and to throw plates at people’s heads, her religion is mine, and long live Buddha !”

Thereupon every one went to bed. In order to reach my room, I had to go the whole length of the hall where the nursery was. The door was ajar. I could not help pushing it open a little, and I perceived Meta busy emptying her trunks and arranging her clothes in her closets. I had been looking at her for some minutes, when she turned her head and saw me.

“Well,” said I, in German, “do you know me this time ?”

She stepped back, and cried out, in French, “What ! you here ?”

“Were you not told that I belonged to the family ?”

“If M. Harris had told me, it is very probable that I should not have come,” she added. “It would make me very unhappy to feel that I have an enemy in a family where I have been so well received.”

“An enemy !” I said, “and why ? I shall be all you please. Dispose of me. Do you wish me to remember all, or to forget all ?”

“I have no more wishes, no more desires,” she replied, with profound sadness. “Fortunately, I have

found here a work to do, and I pray God to help me to accomplish it ;” and she pointed to Lulu, asleep in the bed. Then, with a half-smile: “But what has your memory or your oblivion to do in this room ?” And gently, her eyes on mine, she shut the door on me.

That same night I wrote to Harris: “My dear friend, you have wished to prove to me that, sooner or later, the mountains meet. Rest easy, they shall not fight.”

That same night the watch-dogs of the château kept up a fearful noise till morning. The next day, at breakfast, Madame de Mauserre, who had been wakened by them, asked us what could have made them bark so. A servant answered that a troupe of gypsies had encamped in the neighborhood. She requested Meta to watch Lulu carefully for some days, and not venture with her into the park.—Life would be much easier, madame, if we had to defend our property against brown faces and highway stragglers only.

III.

IF you ever pass through Cremieux, I advise you to stop there. Imagine a little old town, leaning on one side against a natural terrace with a perpendicular wall and the remains of an old fortified convent, and on the other against a rock run over by creeping vines, and crowned by the ruins of an old castle all covered with ivy. This little town, the hotels of which one may well recommend, occupies the centre of a circuit

of mountains, which opens on the west upon the great undulating valley where the Rhône flows toward Lyons. Cremieux is a charming place for everybody, but especially for artists. They might believe themselves in Italy, so classic a majesty do the lines of the landscape assume, so warm in tones are its grounds, so blond and golden its rocks, which seem to exclaim, with the Shulamite, "See how the sun has bitten me!"

The most diverse objects may be found: there, within a narrow compass, both short and vast horizons, the mountains and the plain; above, oak-groves crossed by paths among boxwood and briars; below, the freshness of the walnut-trees, the merry grape-vines, the main roads with their long rows of poplar-trees—now and then a deep gorge where a clear brook murmurs along; or, under an immense sky, marshes planted with alders bathing in black and lazy waters. If you like a rich, smiling country, clover and corn fields traversed by arcades of grape-vines; or if you prefer barren, exhausted moors, protected by some old rock on whose nudity a young vegetation has taken pity and covered it up—all that, and more, is to be found at Cremieux. I spent most of my time in my tower, which stood out from the main building; one of my windows looked upon the wild vale, at the entrance of which the château is seated, and the other upon the plain, which unfolded before my eyes the learned combination of its harmonious lines and successive undulations, and where I could see, moreover, the Rhône sparkle in the distance. I had but to cross my room to go from Poussin to Salvator, from style to fancy.

While I was all admiration, and wandered through the fields, Meta Holdenis was quietly making the conquest of every inhabitant of Les Charmilles. A few days sufficed her to subdue the ungovernable Lulu. She had requested that nobody should come between her and the child ; that no one should interfere with the rules she had laid down or the punishments she would judge proper to inflict. It was a hard point to gain with Madame de Mauserre ; she yielded, however, to the representations of her husband. At the first great misbehavior Lulu became guilty of, her governess shut herself up with her in a large room where there was nothing to break ; then taking a seat with her work by the window, she began to sew, letting Lulu storm as much as she pleased. Lulu did her best ; she stamped with her feet, threw the chairs about, howled. For three consecutive hours there was such a noise that God's thunder would scarcely have been heard. Her governess kept on sewing, without appearing to be either moved or irritated by this fearful hubbub, until, completely exhausted in strength and lungs, Lulu fell asleep on the floor.

After two or three experiences of this kind, she discovered that she had found a master ; and as, after all, this master seemed to love her, and asked of her nothing but what was reasonable, she concluded that it was best to submit.

Children are so constituted that they esteem what resists them ; and a calm reason, that acts instead of reasoning, works upon them like a charm. Lulu, who, despite her mettle, was a good child, became grad-

ually attached to her governess to such a degree that she would not leave her any more, and often preferred her lessons to playing. This clever instructress understood how to awaken her curiosity, to keep her mind interested, always seasoning her instruction with good-humor and playfulness. In short, so rapid a transformation was brought about in the movements of the little miss, that everybody was astonished. When her fits came on her, it needed sometimes only a look from Meta to subdue her. It was a miracle. A gentle firmness, equability of temper, composure, untiring patience, will always work miracles ; but you must confess, madame, that such qualities are very rare.

I do not know where Meta found the time to do all she did without appearing the least over-busy. Lulu's education was not a sinecure ; and yet she undertook, along with it, the housekeeping. Madame de Mauserre had too good a heart to govern a house properly. Her only ambition was to see happy faces around her. I remember, one day, when the rain had driven us for refuge into a wretched inn in the suburb of Rome, she ate up to the last morsel a detestable omelet, merely that the feelings of the innkeeper might not be wounded. She confessed to this weakness herself. "When I have scolded my maid, and she looks cross," she said, "I hasten to make amends, *e m'avvilisco*."

Her servants, whom she spoiled, took advantage of it. Meta was not long in discovering that certain portions of the house-service were neglected, and that

there was waste. On her remarks upon the subject, M. de Mauserre, who was not close with his money, but who loved order in everything, begged his wife to let Meta assist her in the government of the house, which in a short time was reformed, like Lulu. She had an eye on everything, in the laundry as well as in the pantry. Her mouse-like tread was constantly heard on the stairs, and the trail of her gray dress, which, without being new, was always so fresh and clean that it seemed just come from the hands of the mantua-maker, was sweeping noiselessly along the passages. The subalterns were not very willing, at first, to recognize her authority, and there was a good deal of ill-feeling and rude behavior toward her; but Meta's patience here again triumphed, and she succeeded in disarming them by opposing to their sometimes wanton familiarity or bluntness an unalterable politeness. She possessed the tact to tame all sorts of animals; the very dogs of the château had presented their duties to her on the first day of her arrival. To rule was truly her vocation.

At six o'clock the mouse took off her gray vestments and put on a black-silk dress, which she relieved with a crimson bow; an ornament of similar color was put in her hair, and this formed her dinner-toilet. She spoke very little during meals; her attention was chiefly directed upon her pupil, whose exuberance of spirits required close watching. Between eight and nine o'clock she put Lulu to bed, and returned immediately to the drawing-room, where she was always impatiently expected. Everybody at Les Charmilles—

M. de Mauserre especially—was passionately fond of music, and there was no other performer except Madame d'Arci, whose voice, though timid, was correct and agreeable. I cannot recollect a single instance of musical memory to be compared with Meta's ; her head was a complete repertory of operas, oratorios, and sonatas. She played or sang all the airs she was asked, supplying as well as she could what escaped her ; after which, to please herself, she would conclude her concert with a piece from Mozart. Then her face would light up and her eyes sparkle, and it was then that, according to M. de Mauserre's expression, her ugliness became luminous. He had at last conceded to me that, no doubt, Velasquez and Rembrandt would have preferred this ugliness to beauty.

Three weeks after her arrival at Les Charmilles, Meta Holdenis had so well defined her place there, that it seemed as if she had always belonged to the household, and that it would have been impossible to get along without her. If, at the hours when we used to meet in the drawing-room, she was detained in her room, every one would say, coming in : " Isn't Mademoiselle Holdenis here ? Where is Mademoiselle Holdenis ? " M. d'Arci himself, in his better hours, would confess that he began to be reconciled with the ideal. Madame de Mauserre was never tired of chanting the praises of this pearl of governesses ; she called her her angel, and could not bless enough the American Harris for having sent her that good, that amiable girl, that innocent heart, pure as a sky in spring-time. It was

thus she gave vent to her enthusiasm. Of course, I was the last person to contradict her.

One day she took me aside, and told me, with a tremulous voice, that her conscience impelled her to *explain everything* to Meta, and begged me to do it. "I do not know," she added, "how people speak of us outside our own circle, but I should be very sorry if Mademoiselle Holdenis learned through others who I am, and the misfortune attached to my daughter's birth. I hardly think that this revelation will change anything in her affection for us, of which she gives us such constant proofs; but, even if it were otherwise, loyalty obliges us not to let her ignore any longer what she should have known before entering this house." I told her that I approved of her scruples, and promised to fulfill the commission.

I found an opportunity for it the very next day. I had gone out toward four o'clock in the afternoon, and had come as far as Ville-Moirieu—a pretty little village, beautifully situated—when, on the hillock overlooking it, I happened to spy Mademoiselle Holdenis and her charge, who were taking an airing in the *barouche*. I called to them, and persuaded Meta to alight and to allow me to take her to a very pretty cemetery near by, close to a rustic church, and commanding one of the finest views around. She allowed herself to be persuaded, took Lulu by the hand, and walked along with me. The cemetery was well worthy of a visit; I had never before seen one so flowery and grassy. When we entered, a large weeping-willow was just casting over it a soft shadow, wherein the sun was

making silver lace ; everywhere roses and daisies in bloom ; everywhere wandering and humming insects, whose music must certainly have delighted the dead without disturbing them. May it not be agreeable to the dead to hear above them, from the depth of their eternal repose, a vague hum of life, weaving dreams into their sleep ?

We sat down upon a little wall covered with dry leaves. As Lulu did not find the place roomy enough for her frolics, I showed her, in the grass-plot adjoining the wall, a beautiful butterfly, and advised her to chase it ; to which her governess, after some hesitation, consented.

I had sought this interview with Meta in order to impart to her the explanations I have referred to, but it happened that I began to talk to her about something entirely different. There are days, madame, when, without drinking a drop of wine, I get intoxicated. It is an ugly trick my imagination plays me ; it gets drunk on the mere pleasure of being alive—like the goldfinch from eating too many cherries. I had that same day dispatched a picture to the person who had ordered it, and, in boxing it up, had declared, like God when he had created the world, that my work was good. Consider, also, that the weather was superb, and the heat tempered by a fresh breeze ; a few clouds, that wandered over the azure of the sky, cast their shadow on the meadows ; these traveling shadows looked like busy messengers in haste to carry to I know not whom happy news of I know not what. Add to all this that for four weeks disinterested

judges had been constantly praising before me a person who formerly had recited to me "The King of Thule," and who had allowed me to call her *Mäuschen*—can you wonder, then, that on the way I should have made certain reflections, turned over in my head certain *ifs*, certain *perhapses*, to which I answered, "Bless me! and why not?" Add to it, moreover, that Meta wore a new dress, maroon-brown, which Madame de Mau-serre had had made for her by her chamber-maid, and which fitted her charmingly. Finally, be so kind as to consider further that we were seated opposite each other, in the loveliest of cemeteries, and that, in raising my head, I could see right before me a large vase of myrtles. Madame, those myrtles, those clouds, that dress, and the rest, were what caused me, scarcely had Lulu left us, to point my finger at her and exclaim, heedlessly:

"If Tony Flamerin had married Meta Holdenis six years ago, they would have, to-day, a prettier little thing than this to play with."

The apsis of the church made an echo, and this echo repeated, one after the other, all my words. Not expecting anything of the kind, Meta started as if a fire-cracker had exploded in her hand. She bent over the wall to hide her blushing face.

"Lulu, my darling," she cried, "you had better come back!" But Lulu was busy with her butterflies, and did not hear.

"Have I said anything improper?" I asked. "It seems to me that my remark was perfectly reasonable."

"Is it ever reasonable," replied she, curtly, "to regret a doubtful happiness that one has cast away?"

"Ah! now, if you please, which of us two cast it away?" I said; and with the end of my cane I drew upon the sand a wreath of violets, whereon I traced the words, "*Madame la Baronne Grüneck.*" She looked somewhat bewildered at both me and my cane, and then, as if a new light broke suddenly into her mind:

"And is it for that," she cried, folding her hands, "that you wrote below my portrait, '*She adores the stars and Baron Grüneck?*' This wreath, this superscription— How! did you not recognize the writing of sister Thecla? It was a trick she had played on me, knowing how I disliked my handsome suitor. When you caught me, with my head in my hands, I was not in ecstasy, sir, as you imagined; I was meditating a vengeance against my frolicsome sister. How could you for a moment seriously believe—"

She stopped; the tears started in her eyes. She moved her finger along a fissure in the wall, scratching the moss away with her nail. Then, after a pause: "Do you wish me to tell you what serious reason you had not to marry Meta Holdenis? It was because the poor *Mäuschen* was the daughter of a ruined man."

It was my turn now to start from my seat.

"Has M. Holdenis," I asked, "recovered his fortune?"

"What a question! Would he ever have consented to part with me if it had not been a pressing necessity?"

“Very well, then ; no harm done. One of these days history will relate how Tony Flamerin, having found Meta Holdenis again after six years’ separation, took her to a pretty cemetery full of roses, and near a church where there was an echo, and asked her hand, which she granted him out of pure charity.”

She rose, and cried, as loud as she could, “Lulu, it is time to go !” Her emotion stifled her voice, and Lulu did not hear.

I obliged her to sit down again. “Do let Lulu and her butterflies alone,” I said, “and listen to me ! The deuce ! Honest explanations, Burgundy fashion, never hurt any one. I am not going to tell you that I adore you. I shall not describe to you the martyrdom of my amorous flame. In the first place, it would weary you dreadfully, and, in the second, it would be a lie. I fancied myself in love several times, but I have been really so only once ; that was last year, in Madrid. The object of my adoration was a big painting by Velasquez, called the picture of the ‘Lances.’ This rascally picture put me, when I saw it, into a fever for ten days, and cost me ten sleepless nights. It was then I learned what godlike painting is ; but divine folly does not fill up a man’s heart or existence. There are houses where they have once a week a feast fit for an emperor, and live the rest of the time on dry bread and scraps. Long live banquets ! but a good, plain, every-day fare has its prize ; and the plain fare of a heart is a dear companion, such a one as I can now no longer do without—a mutual friendship, tender and faithful, accompanied by an imperious need of living

together. Now, I declare to you in all frankness that never but once in my life have I met a woman that inspired me with the desire to live with her : and that is the person that is now seated on this wall by my side. She has all the intelligence, the wisdom, the gentleness of the strong, all the charm of the humble ; along with all this, she is fond of gray, red, and brown, my own favorite colors. As, up to this time, there has been invented but one honest means by which a man may live with a woman, and that means marriage, I have had—the devil take me!—from the first day that I saw you the desire to marry you. The idea seemed to me at first very stupid, but to-day it looks to me very sensible. Hang that Baron Grüneck ! If it had not been for him, you would now be my wife. But, pshaw ! what was not done may yet be done. And, after all, we have lost nothing by waiting. Formerly—how shall I say it?—formerly I desired you more than I loved you ; now I love you more than I desire you. Besides, at that time I was nothing, and had nothing to offer you but empty pockets and a head full of wind. To-day I am not exactly the Great Mogul, to be sure, but I am somebody ; I have a name, a certain income. The boat is launched—hurrah !—and my wife can have all the money she wants.”

She listened to me very attentively, and in silence, with her head down and her eyes fixed on the ground. Her hands trembled slightly, and I could at times see her bosom swell under her neck-handkerchief—all of which seemed to me good omens. At the word “money” a gesture of indignation escaped her. She

pointed with the tip of her parasol at the four verses composed by the author of "Jocelyn" for one of his friends, and which were engraved in golden letters on a head-stone near by :

"Tout près de son berceau sa tombe fut placée,
 Peu d'espace borna sa vie et sa pensée;
 Content de son bonheur, il sut le renfermer
 Autour des seuls objets qu'il eut besoin d'aimer."¹

"Poetry is a fine thing!" I exclaimed; "but a little property does not come amiss, and I promise you that my wife— There, now! I forget that my wife is not yet mine." Then, stretching out my neck close up to her: "Dear little mouse of my heart, will you have me? If you say 'No,' I shall set out to-morrow for Paris, where I may or may not hang myself, just as I shall feel at that moment. If you say 'Yes,' I shall be in such transports of joy that I shall perform such caperings as you have never seen before; and I shall presently teach Lulu how easy it is to learn to walk on one's head. Perhaps you will ask for time. As soon as I shall have in my pocket an authentic promise, written and signed in due form, I shall wait as long as you please. My hopes are of the patient kind."

She raised her head, and said: "German women have the disagreeable habit of speaking seriously of serious things, and this is why they are in such straits

¹ "Close by his cradle his tomb was placed,
 But little space for life and thought;
 His happiness was all confined
 Within the objects of his love."

when they have to do with French people. It is so hard to know when a Frenchman jests and when he is serious ! I say neither 'Yes' nor 'No ;' I mistrust."

"Look at me !" I said, straightening my face ; "look at me ! a donkey under the lash is no more serious than I am now. And I declare to you, most pertinently, too, that you are not going out of this cemetery until you have answered me."

With these words I took her hand. She tried to disengage it, but I held it tight. She looked for Lulu, and opened her mouth to call her, but Lulu was off in the sky. She had laid herself on her back, and was looking at the traveling clouds ; she was talking aloud with them, and, with the end of a long switch which she brandished in the air, she was showing them the way they should go.

"No evasion," I continued ; "you shall answer me. I mean to prove to you that a Burgundian suitor can be more obstinate even than a German woman." And I added : "Sweet little hand that I hold in mine, which revealed Mozart to me, and once showed me all the stars in heaven, calling them every one by name, you have the wisdom to despise nothing, not even domestic duties. You possess all graces, perfections, and knowledge, and I declare that your destiny is to belong to me—that you have been created for my happiness—to point my life the way it should go—and to sew buttons on my gaiters ! If ever I do anything to displease you, I shall give you my ears to box, and these boxes shall be most delicious. Little, soft, supple

hand, that twists in mine like a snake, will you be mine? Speak—tell me your secret!”

She turned her large, candid eyes on me, and said: “You are a Frenchman, an artist, and you have forgotten me for six whole years. I ask time to reflect. If in two months— See, I am superstitious about anniversaries. Six years ago, on the 1st of September, 1863, we were seated, one evening, upon a bench; the night was beautiful, and you were talking nonsense to me. On the 1st of September of this present year let us meet again in this cemetery. These roses here will be dead; perhaps there will be others. We shall sit on this wall, as we are now, and I will tell you then ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’”

“Agreed!” I replied, letting her go.

“And you will allow me to call Lulu now?”

“One moment yet,” I cried; “Lulu has not done talking with the clouds, and I have not yet acquitted myself of a message I was requested to deliver. It is an adventure I have to relate, which will probably interest you.”

She listened to my whole story with extreme attention. At the first words both face and attitude underwent a change. At times she frowned, or bit her lips, or dug into the ground with her parasol, or, resting her chin in her hand, would fix her eyes upon the horizon as if in search of something.

When I had finished, “You seem quite affected by my story,” I said.

She answered that, if she had known it sooner, she would probably not have come to Les Charmilles, be-

cause she would never have been able to overcome her poor father's scruples. I thought to myself that her father was a curious sort of a man to allow himself the luxury of scruples ; and that, when I should be in my own house, and married, I should not allow his conscience to come to visit us. Then she quoted the German proverb, "He that gives me bread, I will sing his song" — "*Wess Brod ich esse, dess Lied ich singe.*" "It is hard to persuade the world," she added, "that one can disapprove of the principles of the people one loves and serves."

I answered her that the care of her reputation was henceforth altogether Tony Flamerin's ; that she had nothing to fear on that score ; that, moreover, M. and Madame de Mauserre had not sinned from principle ; that a cruel fatality alone prevented their marriage, and that the day which would open to them the door of the church to solemnize it would be the happiest of their life.

She was in a lecturing mood, and she talked so prettily, in a learned and sententious tone, that it was far from disagreeable.

"It is a very delicate task," she said, "to raise a child that owes its birth to a fault. How can I teach her to reconcile the respect for divine law with that she owes to her parents ?"

I replied to her that Lulu was as yet but a very little girl, and that I did not see any particular necessity to explain to her the seventh commandment.

After having remained a few moments silent, she exclaimed : "Even should I wish to go now, I could no

longer do it. A month has sufficed to attach me so strongly to this child, that it would be impossible for me to leave her. It seems to me that I am responsible before God for her dear little soul."

"Responsible," I said, "till the 1st of September. As for the rest, there may be some means of arranging matters ; and if your heart is so much interested in the little lady, you might, after our marriage, still continue her education. She could spend her winters in Paris, and we would spend the summers at Les Charmilles. Now, see, am I not an obliging husband?"

She did not seem to hear me ; she continued to dig into the ground with her foot. She questioned me next about certain details of my own history, which I had slightly skipped over, and which appeared to interest her.

"It is a real novel," she said, "but the only adventures that I take pleasure in are those where the hero and heroine are poor ; M. and Madame de Mauserre are rich, very rich—are they not?"

"Madame de Mauserre left her dowry in the claws of her first husband, but she has since inherited from her father."

"To whom does Les Charmilles belong?"

"To M. de Mauserre. He owns, besides, two houses in Paris. At the risk of his losing your esteem, I must tell you that the poor man enjoys an income of two hundred thousand francs."

"You pronounce the word 'income' with so much emphasis," said she, smiling, "it quite fills your mouth ! I assure you that when I was quite little I enjoyed

only those stories in which hunger marries thirst. The one you have related to me would please me much more if M. and Madame de Mauserre had fled together, to live in a garret where they would have worked and loved.—Holy Poverty !” she exclaimed, with a kind of exaltation, “thou purifiest everything ! Thou takest the place of innocence ! Thou art poetry and happiness together !”

I was going to reply, when Lulu joined us. Meta made a few steps toward her, and, raising her up, pressed her to her heart with an impetuosity of tenderness that would have delighted Madame de Mauserre. We went back to the carriage, where they made room for me. The child was tired, and soon fell asleep. Meta took her in her lap. I tried repeatedly to renew the conversation ; she answered me abstractedly. Her eyes were wandering over the country. She was in a dreamy mood.

When we reached the gate, “Do you think,” asked she, all at once, “that M. and Madame de Mauserre are happy ?”

“They would be much more so if they could marry each other ; but one gets accustomed to anything.”

“Man is born for order,” she replied ; “and when he forgets it, order avenges itself.”

It seemed to me that she was rather turning grave. I tickled her lips with the tip of some burs I had brought with me from the cemetery. “What sets my mind at rest in regard to this disorderly house,” I said, “is that your closets will atone for it, and find favor before the Lord. They are always in such perfect order,

that from the topmost heavens the army of cherubim must take infinite pleasure in contemplating them."

She snatched the burs from my hands, and said: "If you wish to please me you must try to be less of a Frenchman and less of an artist. Promise me," she added, "that you will speak to no one of what has happened to-day between us, and that you will not even mention the matter to me before the 1st of September."

I answered her with one of the four verses she had admired. "Have no fears," I said;

" 'His happiness was all confined,' etc."

At dinner, and during the whole evening, she redoubled her respectful attentions toward Madame de Mauserre; she seemed to wish to prove to her that, although she knew all, she esteemed and loved her none the less. She overdid it; for, in wishing her "good-night," she took her hand and pressed it humbly to her lips.

"Ah, my dear," said Madame de Mauserre, "this is the first time since you came that you have done anything to displease me. Let me show you how friends kiss each other." And she kissed her tenderly on both cheeks.

IV.

ALTHOUGH Meta Holdenis knew so well how to regulate her work that she had always plenty of time

to accomplish whatever she wanted to do, she could not find, in six weeks, a single moment to give your servant a second *tête-à-tête*. She did not look as if she wished to avoid me, but she did not seek me. An instructress cannot be too careful, I suppose.

Besides, an increase of duties absorbed what little leisure she had. M. d'Arci left us to spend some time at a country-seat he had inherited in Touraine, and Madame d'Arci went to join him a few days later. Her father much regretted her departure. He had almost finished the first two volumes of his "History of Florence," and he intended to publish them as soon as a fair copy could be made. As he had been told to spare his eyes, which were very weak, his daughter had offered to recopy the manuscript, which was full of erasures, words written over another, and additional notes, through all of which she knew how to find her way. On her departure he thought of engaging a secretary, when Meta offered her services. He refused at first, but finally accepted, and was soon delighted with his new copyist. Meta, besides having a clearer handwriting, was more intelligent than Madame d'Arci; but what pleased him most was the extreme pleasure she took in her noble task. She became so infatuated with it that she could hardly lay it by. She thought the "History of Florence" admirable, and the historian a very great man. These are things which an author is not unwilling to hear often. There are some that regret that they are not able to pension all who admire them; but not everybody is gifted to the same degree with the talent of admiration. Voice and

gesture are not sufficient. The eye must come to aid them. It must accentuate the praise, and its caresses must inflict upon the modesty of the patient a delicious torture. Meta's look was a speaking look. Saint-Simon said of a great lady of his time, who had meddled with great affairs, that she was "a brunette with blue eyes that expressed constantly all she wished to say." Meta Holdenis resembled this great lady a good deal.

She rendered M. de Mauserre another still more essential service : she all but saved his life. His nerves often troubled him. To relieve himself, he would ride on horseback in the evening and scour the country round. The fatigue would induce sleep. During one of these nocturnal rides he took cold, and this cold terminated in a pleurisy which became alarming. Madame de Mauserre wished, at first, to nurse and sit up with him alone ; but her strength soon gave way, and she had to call upon Meta for assistance. The patient growing worse, she was so beside herself with anxiety that the physician forbade her to approach him. It was proposed that Madame d'Arci should be recalled, but Meta assured them that she could do anything that was needful ; and she kept her word. When he had experienced the charm of being nursed by her, M. de Mauserre, who, when he was sick, was really a spoiled child, would no longer take anything except from her hand, nor suffer any one to come into his room. She not only possessed considerable knowledge in medicine, and knew all about potions and juleps, having treated her brothers

and sisters in a number of serious cases ; she had also the gentleness, patience, the noiseless tread, the supple hand, and the indefatigable smile of an accomplished nurse. Fatigue did not tell on her. After a whole night's watching, she could fall asleep on a chair and wake in an hour again as fresh and lively and as rested and cheerful as ever. That's what comes of loving God and one's fellow-men ! Such sentiments work miracles.

All that trouble got its reward. M. de Mauserre became convalescent and recovered rapidly, as do all nervous natures, which sink and rise again suddenly. One morning, after breakfast, leaning upon the arm of Mademoiselle Holdenis, and preceded by Lulu, who had promised to be good, he succeeded, with the help of a few rests, for which Meta had provided by carrying a camp-stool along, to walk around the park. Madame de Mauserre could not sufficiently express her gratitude to Meta for her kind care and devotion. Wishing to give her some slight proof of her gratitude, she requested Madame d'Arci, who on her return was to pass through Lyons, to buy there the prettiest gold watch, set with diamonds, she could find. It was to take the place of the humble silver one that marked for this excellent girl the hours of her life so usefully employed.

On the day when M. and Madame d'Arci arrived at Les Charmilles I was obliged to leave in my turn, being called to Paris on business : one of my pictures was to be sold, and I wished to put a few final touches to it. Meta, whom I saw a moment before my de-

parture, wished me a happy journey ; but she did not ask me when I should return—an omission which seemed to me an excess of discretion. I had scarcely been one week in my studio in Paris when I received a letter from Madame d'Arci, requesting me to do an errand for her. The last line of her letter read as follows : “ We have particular reasons (my husband and I) to wish that you would hasten your return.” This post-script surprised me ; I did not know I was so necessary to Madame d'Arci's happiness. I had not intended returning to Les Charmilles before the end of the month, but, to oblige them, I hastened my departure, and left a few days earlier. On arriving at the château Madame d'Arci met me on the front steps, and whispered, “ There are certain things going on here that displease us.”

“ What do you mean ? ” I asked.

“ Watch,” she replied, “ and see for yourself. I hope we may be mistaken.”

I could not see anything going on, at first, that was worthy of notice ; however, gradually, whatever arithmetic may say to the contrary, nothings added to nothings grow sometimes into somethings. M. de Mauserre was entirely recovered, and was again busy with his “ History of Florence ; ” but, notwithstanding his daughter's return, he had not reëstablished her in her former capacity of copyist.

I have told you that Meta's handwriting was handsomer than Madame d'Arci's. I observed, also, that he had kept up the habit of taking, every morning after breakfast, a long walk in the park—two hours

long, sometimes—in which Meta and Lulu alone accompanied him. If a third joined them, he was at once made to feel, by M. de Mauserre's coldness of manner and abstraction of mind, that he was not wanted. His temper was less equable than before his sickness ; he was often sombre and taciturn, and his fits of melancholy were followed by a forced merriment. When a man has had the pleurisy, it is quite natural that his temper should show the effects of it ; and then, there is much to be forgiven to an historian who is endeavoring to elucidate some controverted points in the conspiracy of the Pazzi. Meta herself was not in her usual frame of mind. She was absent-minded ; her eyes would wander about without fixed purpose ; at times she was agitated, stiff at others. There were moments when she would take such long breaths as if there was not air enough in the room for her lungs or her hopes. Still, it took a M. d'Arci to imagine that she could entertain any hopes. It was much more natural to suppose that the fatigues of nursing and sleepless nights were telling on her health.

On the evening of my arrival, as she was singing, in the most bewitching of manners, I forget now what air in "Don Juan," she was all at once taken with a nervous attack. She became very pale, and threw herself suddenly back. Fortunately, M. de Mauserre was just then standing near enough to receive her in his arms and carry her to a chair. Can one carry a woman without taking her round the waist ? Perhaps, after laying down his burden, he was a little too long in disengaging his arms ; but, at fifty, one has no longer the

agility of a young man. The next morning the merciless M. d'Arci jested about Meta's fainting-fit, but his father-in-law retorted sharply to his taunts.

I am quite certain, however, that Madame de Mau-serre had not the least suspicion of anything ; she wore her every-day face, her beauty and smile undisturbed. She believed in her husband as you believe in God, madame. He was to her a supernatural being, superior to all common weaknesses, whose loyalty was as inviolable as that of Jupiter when he had sworn by the Styx. And then this crystal soul fancied that every one was as transparent as herself, and that what was concealed from her did not exist. But did they conceal anything from her ? I was much disposed to believe that Madame d'Arci espoused too blindly M. d'Arci's prejudices. M. de Mauserre had said to her, one day, before me, "Oh, you, my dear ! if M. d'Arci assured you in his decisive tone that he could see the stars in broad noonday, you would yourself, after a little hesitation, distinctly see the whole Milky Way, without a missing star."

On the 29th of August, in the afternoon, I went to my studio, which, as you know, was on the first story of an isolated tower, and a few hundred steps from the château. I had resumed my picture of Boabdil with renewed ardor. In order to make sure that no one should come to disturb me in my work, I bolted the door of the tower and took out the key from the lock. I had been painting for half an hour or so, when the wind brought me, through the half-open window, a murmur of voices and steps. It

was M. de Mauserre and Meta, who, accompanied by the child and her nurse, were coming back from their usual walk. The tower occupied the centre of a platform which looked upon the château; at one of the extremities there was a hammock and a swing. Lulu asked her nurse to swing her; I heard at first only her loud bursts of laughter. Soon it appeared to me that two persons were approaching. They knocked at the door and tried to open it. I kept still. They withdrew, thinking, no doubt, that the studio was deserted; it contained, however, a pair of ears that were all attention, and which fancied, moreover, that they had a right to be so.

While Lulu was swinging, the two persons who had been trying to get into the tower began to walk up and down the platform. As they came and went, I could catch, now and then, bits of their conversation. They were at first but unmeaning words, but by-and-by I caught a whole sentence. A very sweet voice was speaking, "Never did any one read men better."

They came still nearer, and stopped right under my window. The same sweet voice said :

"Ah, sir, you are not only born to write history, but to make it! Why am I not queen or empress? It is to Les Charmilles I would come to get my premier. I would tear him from his retreat, and tell him that superior men owe themselves to society; that God does not allow them to bury the talents he has given them."

M. de Mauserre retorted quickly: "You are cruel! Do you not see that you reopen a half-closed wound?"

"Pardon me," she replied, in a tone of contrition ;
"I spoke unawares. I had forgotten—"

"You have a right to make me suffer," he said again. "Do I not owe you my life?"

There was a pause, after which M. de Mauserre spoke a long time in a low tone. I could not seize upon a single word, except the conclusion, which he somewhat emphasized : "When I made this sacrifice I did not calculate all its extent."

Thereupon they resumed their walk. This was, then, the kind of conversation they indulged in, in these park promenades, thought I, as I picked up the brush I had dropped.

A few minutes later they had come back to my window, and I listened again : "You speak of compensations," said M. de Mauserre. "I know but one, and that is, that one gets old, and that a time comes when one considers one's self not any longer worthy of one's own regrets."

"No, no, sir ; do not say so. This time is far off yet."

"Well, now, how old do you take me to be?"

"Indeed, I don't know. You must be—Madame de Mauserre and you—she a little less, you a little over, forty."

He began to laugh a little laugh that came from a well-pleased heart. "You don't read ages well. Take off ten from her, and add twelve to mine, and you will have the correct figure for us both."

"What a false tale-teller your face is, then !" replied she. "But no, I accuse it wrongly ; it tells the truth.

You have the eternal youth of heart and mind, and you will never be old at all."

She interrupted herself to call to the nurse, who was swinging Lulu, "Take care—not so high!" Then she continued, pointing to the child: "Here, here is the compensation I was speaking of. You live again in this dear child, who resembles you, and you alone. Alas! here I touch upon another wound; may this one soon be closed, and the day come when Lulu shall be entirely your daughter!"

He gave a blow with his cane against the threshold of the tower, and answered, sharply:

"If you understood the law, you would know that to be impossible."

They remained so long out of the reach of my ears, that I was afraid I should hear nothing more. It would have been a pity, for their conversation interested me. Fortunately, Lulu was no less interested in her swing; the consequence was that they had time to come once more round, and that, five minutes later, I heard a grave voice saying, "You think, then, that she also suffers from it?"

"She is so good, sir," replied the flute-like voice, "that she conceals from you her regrets, her weariness, her chagrin. She was made for the gay world—to shine—to be admired. To judge from her portrait, she must have been marvelously beautiful."

I was on the point of running to the window and crying out, "And, if you please, she is still the handsomest woman in France!"

I forbore, and M. de Mauserre had time to address

to Meta I do not know what question. She answered : " You embarrass me, sir. Love is so exacting a sentiment, so selfish, that it rarely considers the sacrifices it imposes. It seems to me, however, that if I had the terrible misfortune to be an obstacle in the career of the man I loved, God would give me the strength to leave him—to sacrifice myself to him, happy if his gratitude and affection came to seek me sometimes in my solitude."

This time I uttered, half loud, " Just listen to this serpent's tongue ! "

" I think I heard some one speak," said M. de Mauserre ; and he called, " Tony, are you up there ? " I did not breathe a word.

" You were mistaken ; I heard nothing," answered Meta.

A short time after, she called Lulu and told her that it was time to go back to the house. As the child did not seem inclined to leave her play, she ran to fetch her, and ordered the nurse to take her away ; then she came back to M. de Mauserre, who was waiting for her, seated, I believe, on a stone seat a few steps from the tower.

" Sir," said she to him, " I have a confidence to make to you ; I want to ask your advice. I hardly know how to begin."

He replied, in the most gracious tone : " I conceal nothing from you, and I should be happy to think that I have your confidence, as you have mine."

She got entangled in a long preamble, which he begged her to abridge. " What is the use of all this ?

Let us come to the point, I beg you," he said. At last she determined to begin her story, but spoke so low that only a few syllables reached my ear. I thought I heard her utter repeatedly my name. M. de Mau-serre seemed apparently very much affected by her story, for he exclaimed, from time to time :

"Is it possible ! I should never have imagined such a thing !"

When she had done, as he remained silent, she asked him whether she had unawares said something that could have troubled or offended him. He replied, sharply :

"What does your heart say ?"

"How can I tell ?" she answered. "I am afraid I do not quite understand him."

Then, after another pause, "Do you love Tony, or not ?" he asked, with the same vivacity, in which some anger was perceptible.

The answer was so indistinct, that, to my great regret, I could not catch it.

"Do you wish me to advise you ?" he continued, more calmly. "I, too, am embarrassed now. You were speaking, a moment ago, of the selfishness of love ; friendship is selfish, too. We have known each other three months only, and your society has become to me so sweet, that I shudder at the thought of having to give it up ; the charm of our intercourse has become too great, too dear to me. And yet I am willing to forget myself, and think only of your own interests. I am very much attached to the man you speak of ; he has rendered me services I shall never forget. But,

whatever his merits may be, I doubt if you could be happy with him. He is an artist, and wholly absorbed in his art. Painting and glory are his two mistresses; his wife will always be subordinate to these. Allow me to express my whole thought: you would be for some time his plaything, to become afterward his housekeeper only. My friendship wishes for you a husband that would share in all your tastes and sentiments—that would appreciate your worth, your rare intelligence—a man that could understand your character, so solid and so supple at the same time, and appreciate that charming flexibility of your mind which allows you to enter so well into thoughts the most strange to you, and live, as it were, in the mind of others. This husband you will meet some day, and he will make of you his favorite companion, the confidant of his thoughts, his adviser and friend, in the most intimate and sweetest sense of the word.”

These last words were pronounced with so much warmth, that Meta was considerably moved.

“Then you advise me to refuse him?” she asked.
“In three days I must decide.”

“If you believe me, do not go to Ville-Moirieu on the 1st of September. It will be best. It will be easy for you here to avoid an interview with M. Flamerin. If he becomes too pressing, you have but to ask me to take the matter in hand.”

“Let it be, then, as you say?” replied she, in the submissive tone of a Carmelite about taking the veil.

Curiosity being the stronger, I crept to my window and raised a corner of the curtain. Either I did not

see right, or M. de Mauserre took Meta's hand and kissed slightly the tips of her fingers. Her face was half turned toward me, and I could see the radiance of her brow, and her half-opened lips breathing the emotion of secret joy. Thus smiles the laborer, when, after painful sowing and the rigor of an obstinate winter, he sees the grain rise, and contemplates hopefully the harvest he intends putting into his barns.

A moment after, I saw nothing more : they were gone.

I sank into an arm-chair, where I remained a while motionless ; my arms felt benumbed, my head heavy, my eyes dead. Suddenly, by an effort of my will, I found myself again on my feet, feeling all over my body like a man that has fallen from a height without killing himself, and who assures himself that he is still in possession of all his limbs. After this rapid examination I walked twice round my studio and whistled. I felt happy to find that I could still whistle. I remembered that it was at Dresden I began to cultivate this talent. I thought of Rembrandt's portrait, and Rembrandt made me think of Velasquez. I seemed to hear a voice crying :

“This is the only god that does not deceive !”

I opened the drawer of a table, took from it an old meerschaum I had inherited from my father, filled it with tobacco, lighted it, and was surprised to hear myself exclaiming, “Oh, cooper of Beaune, thy son is all right !” Then I sat down before my easel and retouched the drapery of my Boabdil. Truth obliges me, however, to confess that my brush was a little

shaky, and that my maul-stick had never before been so necessary.

At the end of an hour some one knocked again at the tower. This time it was neither M. de Mauserre nor Meta; I found myself, on the contrary, face to face with the boldest, darkest of gypsies. She had eyes like ink-spots, and the sly look of a night-bird scared by the light. I had met this beauty, in the morning, amid the stragglers of the gypsy band which had made our dogs bark so. I was smitten with her deviltry, her scoundrel graces, and had invited her to come and sit for me in my studio. I hastened to let her in, delighted that she had kept her word. Heaven sent me in her person a model and a companion I was very much in need of just then. While sketching her, I took pleasure in talking with her. I have already told you, madame, that, whenever I meet in good society certain virtues, I am always seized with a holy tenderness for the *canaille*. To be sure, these sudden revulsions of feeling are often dangerous.

The sun was on the decline when I closed my sitting and went out with my model. As we crossed the platform, I perceived, at the foot of the swing, a brilliant object: it was Lulu's medallion, which she had lost while swinging. I picked it up, and at the same instant I spied Meta at the other end of the larger thicket. She was coming toward us with bent head, casting her eyes around her, and stopping at times to ferret in the bushes. I whispered a few words to the gypsy, and slid a gold piece into her hand. There was no need of very lengthy explanations; she was well trained,

and the gold she held in her crooked fingers, and contemplated with a smile, was a sufficient stimulant for quickness of sight and understanding. By paying her well, madame, you could have made her learn Chinese in a week.

We were—she and I—half concealed by the bushes. Meta, absorbed in her search, came close up to us without seeing us. “I forgot my appointment,” I said aloud to the gypsy. “It is too late now ; we must put off our sitting till to-morrow.”

Lulu’s governess stopped short, disconcerted. It was evident that it was not me she was looking for in the bushes. She did not seem pleased with the meeting, and was about beating a retreat, when I cried :

“Lulu lost her medallion ; here it is.”

She thanked me, and came up to take it. Before handing it to her, I added :

“Allow me to introduce you to this daughter of Egypt. Isn’t she lovely ?”

But she did not relish the black beauty. She gave her a severe and uneasy look. One would have thought her a dove, whose opinion was asked about a raven.

“This is a creature,” I said, “possessed of all vices, but who, nevertheless, is not lacking in a certain kind of honor. She lies like a lacquey, but she is not false ; she gives herself out for what she is. She believes neither in God nor in the devil, and for that reason she never takes the one for the other. I grant you that she is as greedy as a pike, as amorous as a cat ; but mind ! she loves men one after

another, and her heart does not sing two airs at the same time. To finish my picture of her, I shall tell you that she stole, this morning, three hens and two ducks ; but I give you my word of honor that she has never trespassed upon the happiness of others—that she has never cheated them out of what they loved.”

Then, turning toward the gypsy :

“Prophet of my heart !” I cried, “you have never read Jean Paul, nor his treatise on the ‘Education of Woman !’ You will always be commonplace and deplorably low, but I believe in your sagacity as far as the things of this world are concerned. Just now you have announced to me what is going to happen the day after to-morrow, in a cemetery where there are roses. Now oblige me by revealing to the lady here present her destiny also.”

Meta gave me an angry look, and tried to run off. I barred the way, and took hold of her left hand.

“Gitanilla,” I cried, “tell me the secret of this hand, which I could not guess.”

The daughter of Egypt advanced with a gesture of astonishment. She seemed plunged in so profound an admiration that Meta was struck by it, and yielded to curiosity. She consented to put her hand into that of the gypsy, but looked away and smiled with pity, as if out of sheer kindness only she was lending herself to a child’s play she did not approve of.

I assure you, madame, that it was a scene fit for a painter. With its sinister and profound look, the raven had magnetized the dove. It sang in Spanish, in a harsh, triumphant voice : “Little beauty, little

beauty with silver hands, thou art a dove without guile ; but sometimes thou becomest terrible as the lioness of Oran, as the tigress of Ocagna. Thou hast a sign in the face—how lovely it is ! Sweet Heaven ! I think I see the moon shine. Little beauty, God preserve thee from sudden falls ; they are dangerous for ladies that wish to become princesses ! ”

At this moment the setting sun lit up strongly the whole château and set all its windows a-glittering. Its four machicolated towers with their turrets ; its terrace with its baluster of white marble, and ornamented with two monumental lions spouting water from their mouths ; its horse-shoe-shaped front steps ; its arched bay-windows, traversed on the front by large stone mullions ; its high attic, with pilasters the sharp edges of which stood out against an opal sky mixed with green—all swam in a bright and soft light. The gypsy still sang on :

*Hermosita, hermosa,
La de las manos de plata,
Eres paloma sin hiel,
Pero a veces eres braba.
Un lunar lienes : que lindo !
Ay Jesus, que luna clara !*

Suddenly changing her voice, she exclaimed, in a clear tone :

“Señorita, you will live a hundred years. There are hearts that never wear out.”

Then, making a comprehensive gesture, embracing park and château within the circle which her forefinger described, she softly murmured : “These oaks, these

groves, these towers, these weather-vanes, these lions—all, all these, fair one, shall one day be thine ! ”

I looked at Meta. I saw her eyes gleam ; but she hastened to drop their lids, feeling that I was looking at her ; and, somewhat disturbed, she quickly turned her back on me, to conceal her confusion and blushes. The gypsy, meanwhile, did not let go her hand, which she continued to examine. Suddenly she frowned, moved her finger slowly over two lines that crossed each other, and cried, with a wild laugh of scorn :

“ *Señorita*, a little advice : Do not chase two hares at once.”

With these words she tore away with incredible speed along the avenue of trees, carrying with her my gold piece, which she had well earned.

Meta, I believe, was on the point of calling her back ; but, recovering herself, she overcame her emotion, like a person accustomed to command herself, and, refusing the arm I offered her, she turned toward the house. I walked by her side. There was in her look a strange flicker, and she walked so fast that one would have thought she meant to go to the end of the world.

“ Well,” said I, “ is not my gypsy a clever little body ? ”

“ I cannot understand,” replied she, with her usual gentleness, “ how a man like you can interest himself in a fortune-teller, or take pleasure in her silly trade.”

“ Who says the trade is a silly one ? Some believe in chiromancy, others in great and small prophets—for we must believe in something. You know, better than I, what is meant by Biblical lot-casting, for I am sure

that you practice it. As little Biblical as I am, I ventured to open, this morning, the Holy Book at hazard; and as your future, which is somewhat mine, interests me particularly, I decided that the passage on which I should chance to fall should concern you. Now, this is the verse upon which my first glance fell: 'God said to Abraham: I will give unto thee the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession.' Is this not a very striking coincidence? The Bible and the gypsy seem to agree in their prophecies."

She answered, dryly: "You do not try to please me; you know very well that this kind of jesting I cannot endure."

And, with that, she hurried on, and reached the house all out of breath. In ascending the front steps after her I hummed between my teeth the verse of Heinrich Heine, which you know: "Upon the pretty eyes of my love have I composed the most beautiful romances, and upon her little mouth the best tercets, and on her little cheeks the most magnificent stanzas. If my love had but a little heart, I should have composed on it a pretty sonnet."

V.

THE next day, toward evening, a servant came to tell me that Madame de Mauserre wished to see me in the drawing-room. I hastened to comply with the re-

quest, and found there a woman almost beside herself, who, in her confusion, could find nothing to say but, "Ah, Tony, my dear Tony ! if you knew—" Fearing somebody might see her in this state, she took me into an adjoining room, which served her as a sitting-room, and there, falling upon a sofa, she drew from her pocket a letter she had just received, and which she handed me to read. It contained the following words : "I hope, Lucy, to be able to announce to you very shortly the happiest of news."

"What do you think it means ?" she asked, fixing her eyes on me, which revealed all the disorder of her mind.

"It's plain enough," I said, "and I am about as glad as you. It means—"

"Don't say it, Tony !" interrupted she, putting her hand on my lips. "And yet—yes, why not ? It is so, and you are not mistaken ; it means that very thing. I was so far from expecting it, that I experienced, just now, a surprise, and, if I must confess, such a transport of joy, that— But is it not very wrong in me to rejoice thus over the expected death of a man whom I should at this moment be nursing, or weeping over ? We were not suited to each other, to be sure, and he made me exceedingly unhappy. He was very sick three years ago. I wrote to him, and told him that I forgave him everything, and that I begged him to forgive me also. I assure you, Tony, there was much feeling in my letter ; it was kind, and he ought to have said, in reading it, 'She is better than I thought.' But, instead of that, do you know what he did ?

Why, he made one of his mistresses answer me ; and this answer was so harsh, so insulting, that I cried over it a whole week. Now I cry again, but it is from joy. Truly, Tony, am I not very wicked ?”

“I am still more so than you, for my joy is unalloyed that at last this old scoundrel has to give up his fine soul to God.” She made me a beseeching gesture. “Hush ! hush, Tony ! there are words that bring ill luck.” To conjure their bad effect, she half praised her brutal husband. “Besides,” she continued, “have I a right to blame any one ? They might well say to me, ‘And what have you yourself done that is so virtuous and rare ?’ And they would be right ; for really, Tony, the man we both avoid naming is no otherwise guilty than for having tried to be as happy as possible. He did it in his own way, to be sure, which was not a handsome one ; but I have done just the same. One day, when I was sad, happiness passed by, singing before my window ; it beckoned me, and I followed it to Italy and to Les Charmilles. Here we are, he and I, every morning more delighted than ever to be together. There are moments when I ask myself what I could possibly have done to deserve this happiness, and I become uneasy, not finding in my whole past a single laudable action.”

“There was once some one,” said I, “who boasted that through his whole life long he had done but one wicked deed ; he was answered, ‘When will that end, though ?’ You, madame, are doing but one good deed, and that consists in making, every day, every body around you happy—not excepting the poor.”

"Oh!" exclaimed she, "the truly good actions are only those that cost an effort. You are too indulgent, Tony. I assure you that, if God consulted his justice alone, he would send me, instead of good news, a serious trouble."

"And I maintain that there is a justice in Heaven, since the infernal rascal, whose name is too odious to pronounce, is finally brought to his end. Only one thing troubles me, and that is that he is not quite dead yet. We are selling the bear's hide before he is slain. If he should recover—the devil!"

"Dear me, yes!" she cried. "My poor mother is too much given to taking her wishes for realities. She has several times given me false alarms, and I am very foolish to get so excited over so slight an assurance, which, after all, means nothing. I had better not say anything about this letter to M. de Mauserre—don't you think so, Tony? He would be beside himself with joy; and if to-morrow he was to learn that he rejoiced too soon, the disappointment would be too bitter."

"Oh, very bitter!" repeated I, energetically articulating and hammering out each word.

She threw her charming head back on the sofa-cushion, and closed her eyes for a few seconds, biting at the lace of her handkerchief; then, sitting up again: "They accuse me, and you the first of all, of being outrageously lazy. You are right; I can't help it; I was born so. And yet, through all that long laziness, my head is not idle; my thoughts are busy every way. Indeed, Tony, I am not near so thoughtless and careless as you think. Not a day passes in which I do

not say to myself, 'Was I worthy that he should thus sacrifice his future to me?' What consoles me in this a little, a very little, is that at Dresden I spared no pains to dissuade him from this course—to make him give me up. He swore to me that he would never regret the step; and, really, I don't think he ever did. My other great fault, after my laziness, is that I am too sensitive in regard to the opinion of society. Very often I was tempted to say to M. de Mauserre, 'Let us go to Paris; you will there be in the midst of all that interests you, surrounded by your favorite studies.' But the courage failed me constantly. Paris frightens me. I fancy I should read the history of my life in every one's eyes. Indeed, my eyes are afraid of other people's eyes." And, folding her hands: "Ah, Tony, if, some day, I could be his wife!—if, some day, my arm in his, he could return to society, and soon to active life again!"

"Have confidence," I said; "it will all come."

She rose, and ran her fingers through her beautiful light-brown hair. Her hair, madame, curled so naturally that she had no need of dressing it; she had but to shake her head and it was all done. "I should like to be beautiful that day," continued she, "so that M. de Mauserre could be proud of me—so that everybody might exclaim, and say, 'It was a crazy thing to do—this elopement—but it was not silly!' Alas! it's I that am silly!" And pointing to her portrait, which hung opposite us, "Either you flattered me dreadfully five years ago, or I have lost the best part of my beauty. What do you think?"

She looked in turns into the glass and raised her eyes upon the portrait, shrugging her shoulders; which did not prevent her from exclaiming, "After all, it seems to me that I am not so very ugly yet."

"You are the most candid, the most innocent, the most loving, and the prettiest of all women!" said I, kissing her hand with a warmth the cause of which she was far from suspecting.

I perceived, as I raised my head, that the door was open, and that Meta had just entered the room. When she desired it, she could walk so lightly and softly that one could not hear her come. At this moment she looked ugly to me. There are landscapes which having nothing very enchanting in themselves, but which are made so beautiful, by certain effects of light, that one prefers them to more graceful and pleasing ones. The soul has also its certain effects of light, which transform a face, and it is for this reason that at given times Meta looked to me charming; but I had noticed that she seldom showed to advantage when Madame de Mauserre was by, not on account of a comparison it would be impossible to make, but because she felt uncomfortable in her presence; there was a restraint, a secret uneasiness she endeavored to conceal. I had discovered the reason of it lately.

She looked at us with surprise, and the expression of her face was at the same time hard and embarrassed.

"Do you know?" I asked, "what we were talking about? Madame de Mauserre maintains that she is not so pretty as her portrait."

"He who made the portrait is a great artist," replied she; "but he who made the model is more than an artist."

"That is something to be settled between God and me, I suppose," I retorted; "but portraits have the advantage of not growing old, and Madame de Mauserre insists that she is about to become an old woman of thirty."

"Ah, madame, of us two, the old woman am I; and yet I am only twenty-four," she replied, in a melancholy tone.

"You are both of you wicked flatterers," said Madame de Mauserre. "We were speaking, my dear, of something else besides. I received a letter—"

"Madame," said I, with a significant look, "King Louis XIV. used to say that we must not boast too soon of the future, for fear of depriving the event of the grace of novelty."

"That is what King Louis XIV. thought," replied Meta; "but M. Flamerin means by it that it is not well to trust everybody."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Madame de Mauserre. "Whom should I trust, if not you? Here! read this letter quickly; I am sure you will share the emotion it has caused me."

She had not time, however, to hand it to her, or to add another word, for the dinner-bell rang, and Lulu, who was hungry, came to call us. During the meal M. d'Arci gave full vent to his teasing and satirical temper. Whether from absent-mindedness or increase of modesty, Meta had come to the table in her gray

morning-dress. He took her to task about it, and asked her why she liked gray so much—was it from a particular love for gray sisters? She thanked him for the attention he paid to her toilet, and answered him that she had always been nick-named “Mäuschen;” that she was born a mouse, would die a mouse, and liked to wear its livery.

“This,” said he, “explains to me many things. I have always thought that there are two kinds of ambitious people: the devourers and the gnawers. The first snap at a piece, the others nibble at it a long time with their little teeth.”

“Explain, sir—explain!” she said, somewhat impatiently.

“Oh!” answered he, “your ambition is very laudable indeed; you only aim at conquering our hearts. There is no one here, from Lulu down to me, that doesn’t adore you.”

“Her secret is a very simple one,” observed Madame de Mauserre; “she spends her life in forgetting herself, to think of others.”

“That was exactly what I meant to say,” retorted he, emptying his glass.

A moment after, he criticised the brown bow Mademoiselle Holdenis had put in her hair. He pretended that brown and gray didn’t go well together; that the one was a frank color and the other a false one, and he called upon me to judge. I did not get time to give my opinion, for M. de Mauserre spoke up, and declared that his son-in-law’s remarks revealed the most fault-finding and dogmatic disposition he had ever known;

and M. d'Arci cut short his compliments for another time, for he knew from experience how far he could go.

Two hours later we were in the drawing-room. Meta had just gone out to put Lulu to bed. A servant entered, and handed Madame de Mauserre a note. She opened it, and uttered a loud cry ; she had tears in one eye and laughter in the other. She rose, and, with tottering steps, ran to throw herself on M. de Mauserre's neck. Her sobs drowned her voice. At last she succeeded in saying, "Alphonse, I am free !"

He disengaged himself from her embrace somewhat quickly. Curiosity makes one impatient. He took hold of the dispatch : the contents made him start. A great surprise may produce such effects. Then he opened his arms to his wife, and said, "He has kept us waiting long enough."

As you see, madame, it is not always true that the first impulse is the best. Meta, meanwhile, came back into the drawing-room. Madame de Mauserre ran to her, and, holding out the note, cried, "Do come, mademoiselle, and read this !"

Meta read it in her turn. She could govern her tongue, but not always her face, and, to employ an old expression, she had not complete mastery over the little imps that served her ; they would betray her sometimes. I thought I had seen, the day before, the same jet of flame in her eyes. She became in an instant as pale as death, and I thought she was going to faint. M. d'Arci watched her with me ; the darkest of smiles was playing around his lips. She got out of it by throwing herself upon Madame de Mauserre and kiss-

ing her so long that M. d'Arci said, at last, "If you please, Mademoiselle Meta, one may kiss people, but not smother them." Then, describing a quarter of a circle, and advancing toward Madame de Mauserre, he added, "Dear madame, be pleased to accept the heart-felt congratulations of your son-in-law."

"Thank you!" answered Madame de Mauserre; "but we have ten months yet to wait."

"That's the law," said M. de Mauserre, with an air of resignation.

The poor woman embraced us all round, and ran to her room, where she shut herself in. Her happiness gave her scruples, her joy scared her; she felt the need of concealing it, and, as she said, to speak of it only to Him who knew all things.

M. d'Arci did not conceal his; it was so noisy that, for some reason or other, it became annoying to every one. M. de Mauserre took up a newspaper; I, a sheet of paper to draw on. A shadow suddenly interposed itself between the lamp and my pencil. I raised my eyes; Meta was standing by me. She was no longer ugly; her face was animated, her eye imbued with a feverish languor, her whole air coquettish.

"May one know," she asked, in a whisper, "what the gypsy predicted to you?"

"In regard to what?"

"In regard to what is going to happen the day after to-morrow, in a cemetery where there are roses."

"She predicted to me that nothing would happen."

"Nothing at all?"

"Nothing at all."

“Why?”

“Because, the day after to-morrow, neither you nor I will go there.”

“Neither you nor I!” said she. “The gypsy told but half the truth, for I shall certainly be there, and shall wait for you.”

M. de Mauserre put down his paper and came up to us. I do not know what he could have heard from our conversation, but he said to Meta, in the most natural way: “Since we are all so happy, it seems to me but right that Lulu should have her share. She has been wanting, for a long time, to see Lake Paladru, which, if I remember well, is a charming lake. I have decided, Mademoiselle Meta, that we take her there the day after to-morrow, the 1st of September.—You will go along—won’t you, Tony?” added he, in a manner more off-hand than encouraging.

“Certainly.”

“And I, too, dear father,” said Madame d’Arci.

“Since no one invites me,” observed M. d’Arci, in his turn, “I invite myself.”

I wrote in big letters on my paper, on which Meta still had her eyes, “Chiromancy is not a lying art.”

When I retired to my room, M. d’Arci ran after me in the hall, and, pulling me by my sleeve: “M. Flamerin,” he whispered in my ear, “I shall have to speak with you to-morrow about some very important business.”

VI.

THE next day it rained all the afternoon; M. de Mauserre and Mademoiselle Holdenis could not take their walk in the park. I took advantage of a clear moment to go to my studio, where I was to begin Madame d'Arci's portrait. She joined me there just as I had done putting the colors on my palette. Her husband accompanied her; he cried, slamming the door noisily: "Let us swear, M. Flamerin, not to leave this room before we have devised some means to get rid of this intriguer!"

He had so tragic a look that I asked him whether he intended employing the knife or poison.

"To exterminate a mouse," answered he, "I know nothing better than poison. If you know of gentler means, I am willing to examine them."

He installed himself in a smoking-chair. I pushed an arm-chair toward Madame d'Arci and took my seat on a stool at her feet, and the sitting began. One would have said, judging from our gravity, that we had come together for a council of war, to deliberate upon a plan for a campaign.

"How she betrayed herself!" said M. d'Arci.

"It is certain," I replied, "that she grew pale and lost countenance."

"She looked like a soul in trouble," added Madame d'Arci, "and the whole evening she kept moving about from one place to another, as if she could find rest nowhere."

"That is a redeeming point in her favor," said I; "it proves that she is not quite yet mistress of the art of deceit."

"From the very first day that I saw her, her intentions looked suspicious to me. Her ugly German face has always displeased me."

"That proves, sir," I retorted, "that you are more far-sighted than I, or that you have more prejudices. Her German face never displeased me."

"What I cannot understand is, that she should have succeeded in bewitching my poor father."

"That proves, madame, that you do not understand the sentiments a woman can inspire in a sick man whom she has nursed, and who has too impressible a heart."

"But what has this intriguer in her favor, I should like to know? She is as ugly as night!"

"Ah, sir, you know I don't think so."

"Do you consider her mind so very brilliant?"

"Well, madame, not brilliant, exactly—useful, rather; and that is, perhaps, the better of the two."

"Say, rather, that her cleverness consists in vile cajolings and fawnings."

"Ah, sir, the best politicians succeed often through the coarsest means, because they take men for what they are—that is to say, big children."

"I do really believe that you are praising her!"

"Heaven forbid, madame! but a good general studies his enemy."

M. d'Arci made a motion of impatience, and I even believe that he gave vent to an oath. "We beat about the bush," he cried, "and lose our time! I heartily

agree with M. Flamerin, that the ingenious mind of Mademoiselle Holdenis is not one of those useless shrubs that ornament our gardens ; I recognize in it, on the contrary, as he does, one of those good little fruit-trees, which, with the help of some care, a little rain, and much sunshine, make their owners good returns. But we have not come together here to discuss her savory merits and virginal graces. Our common wish is to send her back, as soon as possible, to her dear Florissant—to her humble and virtuous home—to her tender father, who complains that during her absence his Mayence hams have lost all their poetry—to her charming little brothers, whose coats are certainly in rags since she is no longer there to darn them under the eye of the Lord. Are we worthy—we heathens—to possess that mystic dove? And what does she want here, among us Philistines? I can understand, M. Flamerin, why you are much less interested than we are in the good work we meditate. We fight, we two, *pro aris et focis* ; but you entertain so faithful a friendship for M. de Mauserre that it ought to stand in lieu of interest. Are we agreed? Well ; so I continue. Without wishing to reproach you, my dear sir, I must remind you that you assured me, on your honor, that my father-in-law, who is over fifty-three years old, had sown all his wild oats, and that to the end of his days he would prove the most reasonable of men. It was upon the faith of this fine assurance that I consented to a reconciliation, on which, at first, I had but to congratulate myself. I was agreeably assured in finding in

the woman, who made him commit at the time the most unpardonable of follies, a person whose elevated and delicate sentiments inspired me from the first with as much esteem as affection. I have but one wish left in their behalf, and that is, that they may soon be able to legalize, by a regular marriage, a union which promised to both a happy future. Since yesterday all legal obstacles have disappeared; but an unpropitious moon has risen over Les Charmilles, and we are threatened with the most frightful of catastrophes. Do not shrug your shoulders. The case is serious; we are in danger of seeing my wife's father disgrace himself by the most cowardly act of abandonment, and take to the altar Lulu's governess, who aspires to become the governess of Les Charmilles and all there is in it."

"Mercy on me!" cried I. "That's bringing misfortunes from a distance indeed!"

"Be so kind as to listen to me to the end," he continued. "I am a staid man, and am not in the habit of getting excited about trifles. I declare to you that my father-in-law is completely weaned from his first love; indeed, beautiful as Madame de Mauserre still is, her face is henceforth unpleasant to him—it is the face of a great folly, which prevented him from becoming ambassador to Constantinople or London. And there it is! people will not be sincere enough to confess to their absurdities. For his misfortune as well as for ours, Heaven and M. Tony Flamerin have brought here one of those hypocrites who, while they cast the most pious glances to the clouds, and have constantly one hand on their hearts, pick their neighbor's pocket

with the other. Without speaking of her talent to prepare cooling drinks and dust the house-furniture with special grace, this good-for-nothing adventuress has seduced our pensioned diplomatist by her attentions, her cat-like caressings, her clever flatteries, her sugary protestations, her sugar-plum airs; by her never-ending admiration and her dying-carp eyes, which repeat to him from morning till night, in high and low Dutch, that he is the greatest of men. Let him declare his passion to her if he chooses; let her yield at discretion if she has a mind to—it is their business, and I shall make no objection; but this small piece of a Maintenon has taken it into her head to marry him. She will play the dragon of Virtue, will always send him away dejected, but will take good care not to drive him to despair, and you will see how these manœuvres will end. Irritated by her mock virtue, he will one of these days leap the ditch, however deep it may be. A little shame is soon drunk. Do you suppose I shall accept this hussy for a mother-in-law? Thanks! That's asking too much of me, and I mean to go presently and see M. de Mauserre, and have a frank and peremptory understanding with him on the subject. Either this creature shall leave to-morrow, never to return again, or this very evening my wife and I will give up the place to her and leave ourselves. M. de Mauserre loves his daughter. I fancy that my little harangue will make some impression on him."

Madame d'Arci felt a little hurt by this somewhat off-hand speech, but she took care not to show it; she loved her father, but would have hanged herself rather

than contradict her husband. She thanked me with a look, as she heard me retort as follows :

“My dear count, your premises seem to me altogether unwarrantable, and your conclusions very daring. M. de Mauserre is of a melancholy temperament ; he is a hypochondriac, who has not obtained from Destiny what he had hoped for, and fancies he has cause for complaint. You must also consider that he has reached an age when love is hardly anything else for men than the need of agreeable society ; the women that please them are those who know how to pity or admire them, to amuse or console them. Now, it has pleased Heaven, and an American who was at a loss for amusement—for Tony Flamerin washes his hands of the whole affair—to send us here a person that is neither a hussy nor an adventuress ; insults have never proved anything, and Mademoiselle Holdenis is simply a very intelligent, skillful, and insinuating person, who possesses the art of entering fully into the feelings of people, and of sharing their quarrels with life. I do not deny that the charm M. de Mauserre is under might carry matters very far, if he were to give way to it, nor that Mademoiselle Holdenis is an ambitious woman, whose imagination caresses certain dreams which seem to be quite in accordance with her religion. Let us state the worst : if Madame de Mauserre were to die to-morrow, you might perhaps have some difficulty in preventing your father-in-law from marrying his daughter’s governess. He is of too liberal a mind, and considerations of fortune and birth would never keep him from following his inclinations.

I know no man more free from prejudice than he. Fortunately, Madame de Mauserre is alive, and very alive; and M. de Mauserre is a man of honor, who considers his word sacred. What I fear, my dear sir, is an awkward intervention, which would irritate him and spoil all. He belongs to the race of the high-minded. If sometimes he yields to his own reflections, he has, on the other hand, very little regard for the reflections of others, and his pride will never accept lessons from other people. For Heaven's sake, give up the idea of lecturing him, and let him alone! Your too plain explanations would drive him to passionate and unreasonable acts, and perhaps he might then grant to his anger what he would surely refuse to his passion, since you persist in thus styling a mere fondness for a person who, through her manners and fine mind, is better able than we are to keep him company."

"I think that M. Flamerin is right," Madame d'Arci hastened to say, after a side-glance at her husband to see how far she might venture. "It is possible that we see too much the dark sides of things, my dear Albert, and that the peril is not as imminent as we think. And yet, can nothing be done, M. Flamerin? Shall we allow the malady to take its own course, without applying any remedy? It is a dreadful feeling to have the enemy thus installed in the place, and make no effort to drive him out. Surely we ought to do something to rid my poor father of his lady-companion, who is certainly not a lady of honor. If M. d'Arci's intervention seems dangerous to you, suppose we reveal the case to Madame de Mauserre. I am sure that

her representations would be listened to; a love does not last six years without leaving some fire under its ashes. Let us go to her; let us open her eyes; let us cure her of her blind confidence, which is the real danger, and let us seek, with her, the means of driving, without too much noise, these dangerous blue eyes, so threatening of tempests, from the premises."

"Oh, madame, you make me shudder!" cried I. "Don't you see that this confidence, that you call blind and which I think adorable, is our only plank of safety? It is through and by this very confidence that Madame de Mauserre holds, without suspecting it, the secret machinations of Mademoiselle Holdenis in check, and deprives M. de Mauserre of all power to wish, hope, or even devise anything. Would any man of heart betray a woman who believes in him as in the Eternal Father? To disabuse her would be ruining all. At the first word that would enlighten her, she would lose her senses—would be crazed with anxiety and trouble. Expect from her neither prudence, nor calmness, nor skill: she will break loose, and only play into the enemy's hands. A strange way, this, to make a breach into the besieged place which you wish to save!"

"You reject everything we propose!" replied M. d'Arci, getting cross. "Find, at least, some expedient or other; else I come back to my own good remedy—that is, rat-poison."

"I beg of you, let me manage the whole affair."

"And what will you do?"

"I mean to cause the besieger to raise the siege."

"By making an appeal to her exquisite sensibility, or to the delicacy of her soul?"

"No, in another way. Do not ask me how; it is my secret."

"And you promise us to succeed?"

"I shall do my best. Promise me, on your side, not to say anything about it to Madame de Mauserre, and even to show a good face to Mademoiselle Holdenis."

He answered me that it was asking of him a great deal, but that he would consent to try first my experiment, after which, if it did not succeed, he would go back to his, and make an end of it. He went out twisting his mustache, and humming the favorite song of the Great Frederick:

"I shall treat her, biribi,
In the fashion of barbari,
My friend."

Toward evening the rain ceased and the weather cleared up. The next morning, when we awoke, there was not a cloud in the sky. Six o'clock had not yet struck when two carriages, each drawn by three stout horses, awaited us before the gate of the terrace. Every one was prompt to the *rendezvous*, not excepting Madame de Mauserre, upon whom happiness had bestowed additional valor. She joined us, with eyes yet full of sleep, and all wrapped in furs as in mid-winter. M. de Mauserre persuaded her to get into the barouche, the top of which, being raised, would protect her against the coolness of the morning. He himself got into the break, intending to drive, and

called to him Lulu and her governess. He had not, however, calculated upon his mischievous son-in-law, who took particular pleasure in inviting himself to a seat there, under pretext that he hoped to be benefited by the instructive conversation of Mademoiselle Holdenis. He would listen to no objections, and affected not to notice the frowns of his father-in-law, who was at last obliged to submit to his troublesome company. I took a seat in the barouche with Madame de Mau-serre and Madame d'Arci, and we drove off.

If you wish to know something about the Vien-nois country, madame, and have not the time to visit it yourself, you may study the excellent guide of Joanne ; but it would be impossible for me to describe to you, with any kind of fidelity, the country that lies between Cremieux and Lake Paladru. Although, both from taste and profession, I am an admirer of fine landscapes, I had left my painter's eyes at Les Charmilles ; I was nothing more than Tony Flamerin, with some great scheme in his head. The fear and anxiety with which M. d'Arci's war-plans had filled me caused me to make a rash promise, and I was cogitating in my mind how I should honorably discharge myself of the undertaking.

The secret means I had boasted of appeared to me, upon examination, rather questionable, and I hesitated to make use of them. In order to see clearly what course to pursue, it was necessary to have a clear idea of my own feelings. At times I fancied I hated, like a plague, the enemy I had undertaken to drive away, and I promised myself to treat

her without mercy; a moment after, I would catch myself doubting this hatred, wherein entered perhaps more resentment, more jealousy, than aversion. You have read Tasso, and the episode of the bewitched forest which Tancredi had undertaken to free from the spell. He should have begun by liberating his heart; for you know what happened to him and to his sword when the tree he meant to split in two showed him Clorinda's face—the Clorinda he foolishly thought he loved no longer. I asked myself if I was quite cured of my Clorinda, and if at the decisive moment I should not feel the sword of inexorable justice tremble in my hand. My only resource was in relying upon some unexpected event, some incident or other, that would inspire me with a resolution; but what sort of a skill is that which relies upon accidents? M. d'Arce would have heartily laughed at me if he had read my thoughts.

Thus was my mind engaged, and you will easily excuse me for visiting one of the most beautiful countries in the world without seeing it. I remember, however, long lines of hills shaded by oaks that served as a frame to fertile plains covered with rich harvests. We drove on for hours over a hilly plateau; we could see others forming an amphitheatre around us, all crowned with pretty villages, high steeples, and massive châteaux. I remember, also, that we drove through pretty hamlets, whose whitewashed houses watched us driving past. I remember, further, that under their pent-houses hung hurdles to dry cheeses, and that there came from their windows a vague hum

of spinning-wheels and weaving-machines. I recollect that on coming through these hamlets we drove under big walnut-trees, whose lengthened shade slept peacefully on the dusty road ; on the right and left, haystacks ; then, as far as the eye could see, clover and corn and blossoming buckwheat-fields, through which ran disheveled grape-vines with red-spotted leaves, which seemed to hold each other by the hand and dance like so many madcaps. That they had that air of jollity I can assure you, but what put them into so frolicsome a mood I could not tell. Our horses having relaxed their pace to ascend a hill, my ideas became clearer, and I looked a long time at a fresh valley that resembled one of those pictures of Poussin, where he amused himself bringing together the most diversified scenes of country-life. In the back was seen a turf-pit where two men were opening a trench, while a third gathered the turf into piles ; a few steps farther, a bed of green peas and some women busy picking them ; others washing clothes in a brook near by ; next, children cutting willow wands ; a meadow where a few cows and a white horse were pasturing ; on the side of the valley a ploughed field, rich and shiny, in which a plough drawn by four oxen was moving up and down. Men, women, children—all these people were talking and laughing ; the turf talked with the peas, the plough with the washerwomen ; the cows put a word in now and then while chewing their cud ; and the gravity of the animals seemed a satire on the gayety of the men. Shed over this scene the transparent vapor and softness of an autumn sun, drinking in

drop by drop the sweat of the earth, and you have a picture—indeed, Poussin himself could do no better.

I know something more interesting than the most beautiful landscapes ; and that is, the spectacle of a happy soul—when this soul is neither that of a wicked person nor a fool's. Madame de Mauserre gave me this spectacle. She was happiness personified ; it shone in her eyes, in her smile ; she was enveloped in it as in a fluid. One would have thought that she had been living for only two days ; the world seemed to her a charming novelty ; the most insignificant objects threw her into childlike delights and wonderments. Had she not just discovered that there is a sun ? Her look seemed to say, " By the way, do you know that in ten months I shall be his wife ? " This good soul would have liked to shed her joy all around her—spent her gladness in alms all along the way. She spied, in a field, a ragged child pasturing a flock of turkeys. She ordered the carriage to stop, and ran to the child and kissed it, and talked with it, seated on a stone, the frightened turkeys the while cackling and spreading their feathers around her. In going, she left two gold pieces in its hand. A little further she emptied the rest of her purse into the hat of an old blind man. We looked at each other knowingly—Madame d'Arci and I—and the look meant a great many things.

From the valley that made me think of Poussin to the village of Abrets, where we halted to breakfast, I was less absorbed, and I can assure you that that road

has perhaps not its equal anywhere. It runs through the gladdest, the freshest of orchards, covered with so soft a grass that I almost wished I was a sheep, that I might browse it. The two rows of trees between which we were driving arched their branches above, and formed arbors over our heads. We did not catch up with the break till we reached Abrets. They had driven like the wind, and did not stop to talk with turkey-shepherds ; the driver, being out of sorts, was but too glad to have three horses to whip with all his might.

You would not believe how little like himself M. de Mauserre was under certain circumstances. There were two men in him, of which the one was as careful of his command over himself as the other was not. During my stay at Dresden he had the management of a very thorny affair, and I had seen him oppose to all its vexations the most impassible and uniform expression of face ; but in private, and when the question turned upon himself alone, he was incapable of dissembling ; his annoyance showed itself freely on his face, where every one could read it as from an open book.

He was as gloomy as a prison-gate during the whole breakfast. M. d'Arci affected not to know why, and exasperated him with his attentions. In leaving the table he paid him back, however. There was in the garden of the inn a shooting-gallery. M. de Mauserre, who was a first-rate shot, challenged his son-in-law, and hit the centre three times, one after the other. The pit clapped, and the pearl of governesses cried, "Do tell us,

sir, once for all, what talent is it that you do not possess?" M. d'Arci sent his ball into one of the target-posts, and found fault with the pistol, which he declared detestable. His second shot was hardly better. He persisted, however, till he hit the white of the target, and was so long at it, that, in leaving the garden, he found that his father-in-law had got ahead of him and had driven off with the break, leaving him behind. He was therefore obliged to take a seat in the barouche with us. "Serves you right!" said Madame de Mauserre, laughing; then, in a more serious tone: "M. de Mauserre complains that you indulge in the ugly habit of teasing Mademoiselle Holdenis. Your jests might, in the end, injure her in the mind of her pupil. We are so glad of the absolute empire she has over our wild little kid!" He began to sneer, but I pinched his arm, and he swallowed his reply.

In leaving Abrets the road ascends a pretty steep hill for a long distance. On reaching the summit we left the main road, and struck into a lane that takes the traveler, in twenty-five minutes, to the village of Paladru, a short distance only from the lake, at the foot of a church perched on a hillock. I can tell you, madame, all about Lake Paladru, for we made a rather closer acquaintance with it than I should have wished. If you were fond of statistics, I could tell you that it is situated fifteen hundred feet above the level of the sea; that it is about six miles long and two miles wide; that it is very deep; that its water has mineral properties, and acts very effectively in certain maladies; that it has a slightly soapy taste, which does not pre-

vent its being very rich in fish. I prefer telling you, however, that one should not visit Cremieux without going to see this pretty lake and its delightful surroundings. The country abounds in superb ash-trees ; some of the mountains that encircle its two shores are highly cultivated, and others are woody and wild. The lake, according to the hour of the day and the caprices of the wind, assumes a variety of tints—from the finest opal to azure blue or leaden gray. In short, Nature amused herself gathering on its shores the greatest variety of scenery : creeks, bays, promontories ; here, clusters of trees bending over the water and dipping in it their tresses ; there, a pebbly beach ; further off, little cliffs beaten by the waves. If you ever go there, stop on one of these cliffs a few paces from the village, and look to your left. Beyond the lake and its reeds you will see, on the foreground, a curtain of silver-leaved willows ; above the willows a height shaded with fine walnut-trees, through which peep a church-steeple and the towers of a castle ; and, if the weather is clear, through the opening the hills have left, Mont Blanc will rise before you in all the dazzling glory of its snows, showing at the same time its two sides, the one gradually sloping toward France, and the other upright, like a gigantic wall, whereon the eagles themselves must become dizzy.

The traveler's guide will give you, madame, an account of the beauties of Lake Paladru ; but it will not tell you that it is a place where one may meet with disagreeable experiences. The one I had there demonstrated clearly that the profession of preacher has

its dangers, and that German women have sometimes strange fancies.

VII.

Two hours after our arrival, Madame de Mauserre, tired from the ride, satiated with the lake and Mont Blanc, had fallen asleep upon one of the sofas of the Hôtel des Bains, and Lulu was sleeping also on a cushion at her feet. Waiting for dinner, M. de Mauserre, who was as expert in chess as in pistol-shooting, and who wanted another opportunity to humiliate his son-in-law, proposed a game, and the latter accepted, in the hope of a chimerical revenge.

Meta soon went out and gave her thoughts an airing upon the beach, where a boat, coming from the other end of the lake, had just landed. The boatmen who rowed it had fastened it to a post and rolled the sail around the mast. She took it into her head to get in. I saw her sit down near the prow and remain there motionless, bending over the water that, perhaps, served her as a mirror. The opportunity seemed propitious. In a few seconds I had joined her, slyly unfastened the boat, and, taking oars in hand, pushed off into the lake.

At first she appeared frightened at being alone with me on the frail shell, and besought me to take her back. I pretended not to hear her, and continued rowing. Gradually she became quieter, and resigned herself to her fate. She took a seat at the stern, near

the rudder. When we had gone beyond the middle of the lake, I rested on my oars and let the boat drift. She watched me closely, questioning my face in silence.

Having found, the day before, on one of the shelves of the château library, an old edition of the "*Provinciales*," I had the curiosity to look into it. One passage impressed me particularly, and engraved itself in my memory. Leaning against the mast, I quoted, folding my arms: "Truly, Father, it is better to have to do with people that have no religion, than with those who are so profoundly religious that they take motives into account; for, indeed, the kind motive of him who wounds another does no good to the one that is wounded. He cannot see this secret motive, and feels only the blow. And I do not know whether one would not feel less provoked in being brutally killed by angry persons, than to feel one's self conscientiously murdered by devout ones."

I added: "Ah, what a great man Pascal was! and what a dangerous science casuistry is!"

"To whom are you talking?" she asked, smiling; "to the sky, to the fishes, or to me?"

"To somebody," I replied, "who has accused me more than once of being a trifler; and I answer to that somebody, Let us forgive these triflers, for they undo the next day the harm they have done the day before. I fear far more those who injure others from conviction! It is of them that Pascal has said, that one is never so fully nor contentedly a scoundrel as when one is such from conscientious motives."

She looked around her. "I do not see the Jesuit to whom your speech is addressed," replied she, gently. "You ought to know that I have been brought up to dislike these good Fathers as much as you."

I took the oars again. I had soon doubled a little cape, the foliage of which concealed from us the village and the hotel. Meta was no longer afraid. She said, in a very calm tone: "What will they tell Lulu when she wakes, and asks for her governess?—Is it an elopement?" she said again. "Ah, I forgot—it is, to-day, the 1st of September, and we were to come to an understanding. But a lake is not a cemetery!"

Then she turned away, and contemplated awhile Mont Blanc, which appeared indistinctly behind a cluster of chestnut-trees.

I again let go the oars, and, a second time leaning against the mast, I made a cigarette and lighted it.

"The Jesuits have a broad back," I replied. "It is possible that they may have invented the fine art of prevarication in all security of conscience; but I have been told that casuistry is cultivated in more than one country where they are not at all in favor. There are minds found there that make use of their subtlety to find good reasons to justify the most unjustifiable acts. There are others who despise the good commonplace morality of honest people; they put it through an alembic, and their double-distilled maxims authorize them to allow themselves little licenses which common martyrs would disdain. Others, again, use their religion, which is a sincere one, to sanctify their covetousness. Their most interested actions become hal-

lowed. These children of God look upon the whole earth as their special inheritance, and, convinced that Heaven has committed to them the duty of obliging the wicked to make restitution, they appropriate to themselves, not without a tear in the eye, all they can."

I threw my cigarette into the lake. "I have heard of a sinner," I continued, "who, to tell the truth, had sinned but once; life had been so indulgent to her that she found happiness in her fault. A saint happened to pass, and, seeing this happy criminal, exclaimed: 'What a bad example! The divine law of this world is order, which this woman has transgressed. The interest of Heaven and morals requires that I deprive her of her ill-gotten happiness. I will take her house, I will take her husband, I will take her child, I will take her past and her future, her memories and her hopes—I will take all from her, and God will say, "Well done, angel of light! there is one disorder less in the world."'"

The blood rose to her cheeks, and she said: "For some days you have been speaking in riddles; tell me, once for all, what ill-feeling you harbor in your mind against me, and of what infamy you suspect me."

"There is yonder," I replied, "in a village inn, a woman peacefully asleep. May she never wake again! for, some day, she will be crazed with despair in discovering that Mademoiselle Meta Holdenis has conceived the honorable and bold project of marrying M. de Mauserre."

Her face assumed a hard and angry expression, which I had never seen on it before. But it was a stage-trick only; the scene soon changed. The almost ferocious look which her eyes fixed on me, like the sting of a bee, gradually grew soft; her closed lips relaxed; her frowning brow became again as smooth as glass; she lowered her head, and I thought I could see tears under the eyelids. I waited a moment for her to speak, but in vain.

Mountain lakes are capricious and fantastical. When we embarked there was not a breath of air, nor a wrinkle on the smooth surface of the water, which was of a silvery blue. Soon the shadow the hill threw over it assumed an emerald color; the green, encroaching upon the azure, invaded the whole lake, which was seized as with a chill, and a chopping sea arose. The boat had drifted far into the lake. More and more embarrassed from Meta's prolonged silence and my own, I decided upon returning. I headed the boat toward the village of Paladru, whither the breeze was driving us, and unfurled the sail, requesting Meta to take charge of the rudder, which she had but to keep straight. She answered with a nod, and took hold of the bar with a determined hand. The sail filled, and the boat sped like a horse that feels the spurs; already the reeds and pebbles of the shore became distinct.

Meta raised her head; her half-opened mouth drank in the wind, and her bosom swelled. "I want to recite to you once more," murmured she, "the 'King of Thule.' Listen!" And, with the same voice in

which she formerly had recited those verses—which, thanks to her, I knew by heart—she said :

*“Es war ein König in Thule
Gar treu bis an das Grab,
Dem sterbend seine Buhle
Einen gold’nen Becher gab.”*

The wind increased from second to second ; suddenly a strong blast shook the sail so violently that by turns it beat the mast and filled again, as if it would split. The lake had passed from green to gray ; it was spotted with foam and ruffled like an angry thing.

Suddenly, at an awkward movement of Meta’s, the boat bent and took in a quantity of water.

“Take care !” I said ; “the least carelessness will capsize us.”

She had come to the last stanza :

*“Er sah ihn stürzen, trinken,
Und sinken tief in’s Meer.
Die Augen thäten ihm sinken ;
Trank nie einen Tropfen mehr.”*

She repeated the last four verses twice, then looked at me. Her face had a singular expression. She took off her cap and let the wind play with her hair, that fluttered about her temples ; her cheeks were burning, and from the depth of her eyes, fixed on me, a mysterious passion gleamed.

“Your gypsy,” she cried, “was a liar ! Did she not prophesy that I should live a hundred years ?” And, lowering her voice, she added : “We were to decide

to-day whether we shall spend our lives together. Since you think no longer of it, I will at least die with you."

With these words she gave the rudder so violent a wrench, that in the next second our boat was upside-down, and your servant had six feet of water over his head.

Madame, we do not always know in this world what is useful and what injurious. I should never have imagined that my intercourse with my friend Harris could be of the least use to me. However, when I recovered from my first surprise, and from the bottom of the water had come up to the surface, my first thought was to congratulate myself on having spent three months with him at Geneva, because, bathing every day in the lake, he had made of me a skillful swimmer. I assure you that at that moment all my paintings of the past or future seemed a mere trifle compared with the faculty I possessed to keep myself above water. As my ideas became clearer, my second thought was that there was close by me a woman drowning, and that I was determined to save her or perish with her. You may think what you please, madame; but it was not from a movement of humanity or compassion: I felt for the first time a sort of passionate fury. I had forgiven Meta everything in favor of the charming and laudable intention she had had to drown Tony Flamerin; it seemed to me all at once that life was no longer possible without her. This sentiment will no doubt seem extravagant to you, and you will think that the water of Lake Paladru, of which I had swal-

lowed a considerable draught, was, in addition to its other virtues, more heady than Rhine-wine. Alas! madame, it is not necessary to be drunk to be out of one's head. There is some madness in all human passions. It is the heart of man that flies to the head.

I made a plunge, but could not see Meta. Fear was getting the better of me, when I thought that her dress might have been caught in the rudder, and that she might be under the boat. It was so. I soon got her loose. She was completely unconscious; but I had no serious alarms, because she had hardly been more than a minute under the water. A slight motion she made with her fingers reassured me entirely. Keeping her head up with my left hand, I worked so vigorously with my right arm and legs that the great Harris himself might have been proud of me. After a few moments, which seemed ages, I had the infinite satisfaction to touch land.

My first thought was to lay Meta on her side. She opened her eyes, but closed them again immediately. I took her up in my arms and carried her as fast as I could toward the inn, which was not far off. I was met half-way by two enraged boatmen, who, overwhelming me with insults, wanted their boat back. I pointed to it, assuring them that it was safe enough, although it did not look so. My well-filled purse, which I held out to them, softened them, and they offered to help me with my burden; but I meant to carry it myself. Madame de Mauserre, who meanwhile had awakened, was just coming out of the hotel with Lulu, in search of us. As they perceived us in that

plight, they both began to shriek and fill the air with lamentations. I had an easier time with the owners of the boat than with Lulu, who took me to task about her governess. The worst was that her screams brought M. de Mauserre out. He had left his game, flown into the yard, and I really thought I would have a serious affair with him. He was furious. I hastened to dispel his anxiety by assuring him that Meta was alive; but he was less troubled by apprehension for her life than tormented by jealousy to see her in my arms, which held her tight, her cheek close to mine, and her hair sticking to my temples.

He came upon me with clenched fists, and cried, "You are a miserable fool!" This exclamation gave me an idea of the depth of his wound. "You forget yourself, sir," I replied, coolly; and, pushing him away with my shoulder, I entered the inn and laid my burden down. My strength as well as my enthusiasm was spent, and I was glad to be relieved.

M. d'Arci had meanwhile joined us. He shrugged his shoulders when he saw Meta, who was as pale as death, and said to me, "What a juggler!" Then grumbled between his teeth, "The idea was ingenious, but the courage failed you."

VIII.

THE prompt attentions of Madame de Mauserre, assisted by her daughter-in-law and the innkeeper's wife, soon brought the pearl of governesses back to

life again. She was undressed and put in a warm bed, where she was not long in recovering her senses. Her first word was for Lulu, who threw herself on her with transports of joy. During that time I had exchanged my wet clothes for a peasant's attire, and went down into the kitchen to warm myself. I found M. de Mau-serre standing before the mantelpiece.

"You will please explain all this to me," said he.

"I beg pardon," I replied, somewhat sharply. "It is rather I who should ask explanations of you."

Our old friendship triumphed, however, over his jealousy and pride, and he continued, in his former pleasant way: "You are right; Lulu's cries had completely unmanned me. Excuse me, I pray, and let us forget it."

I shook hands with him, without satisfying, however, his curiosity in regard to the details of our shipwreck. All that he got out of me was that Mademoiselle Holdenis imprudently chose the moment when the wind blew the hardest to let go the rudder. "Which proves once more," I added, "that women are bad pilots, and that we should not allow ourselves to be governed by them either on land or water."

Provoked at my reserve, he took me into the embrasure of a window, and, looking steadfastly into my eyes, said, abruptly:

"Have you any serious intentions in regard to Mademoiselle Holdenis?"

"What does it matter to you?" I replied.

"I am interested in both of you, and I do not think that you suit each other."

“Whom, then, does she suit?” I asked, looking, in my turn, steadfastly at him.

“My daughter, to whom she is a necessity. Be frank with me. Is your heart very much engaged in the matter?”

“Perhaps,” I said; “but she alone has a right to question me on that subject.”

In the mean time the dinner was announced. I felt a real Burgundian appetite, and I had truly earned it. I did full justice to the repast, especially to a delicate grayling that had been caught that same morning very near the place where we were capsized. This product of Lake Paladru was delicious. You see how good-natured I am! M. de Mauserre ate but little, and did not say three words. Madame de Mauserre never wearied of questioning about my nautical adventure, and thanking me over and over again for having saved the life of so dear a person. M. d’Arci crammed in food after food to put himself into an impossible position for talking; and Madame d’Arci looked on with a quiet smile, and whispered to me, “Brave knight, what does it all mean?”

At the dessert Madame de Mauserre left us to look after Meta. She soon came back to tell us that the heroine of the day was getting on finely, and that, having taken some broth, she insisted on getting up. As her clothes were not yet dry, they were trying to get her some others. Lulu, who could not do without her governess, asked to go to her; and, being refused, she began to cry, and stamp with her feet, as in her former days. To calm her, M. d’Arci made her paper

dolls ; everybody engaged in the sport, and the table was soon covered with them. After having furnished my quota, I went out into the garden to smoke a cigar.

The moon, in its second quarter, covered half the lake over with silver ; the other half lay in deep shadow. It was no longer angry, but it seemed to have retained a sort of vague emotion ; its waves stammered at intervals unintelligible words, as a child overtaken by sleep in its anger will still murmur in its dreams. I thought I would look after Meta. After what had happened, I fancied we ought to have a few words together.

I returned to the house through a back-door, went softly up-stairs, crept along the passage to her door, and was about to knock, when I perceived that she was not alone.

I heard her say, "Tell me about my deliverer."

"He is in the best of humors," replied a gruff voice, which I recognized to be that of M. de Mau-serre.

My first impulse was to push the door quickly open, my second to keep my breath and listen ; but good consciences produce scruples, as good lands bear good wheat. To escape this temptation, I turned back, and went stealthily into the room where I had changed my clothes, and where my own were drying by a fire.

I was busy turning them over when I became aware that the two voices had resumed their talk. Remember, madame, when you visit Lake Paladru, that at the Hôtel des Bains the beds are soft, the meals liberal and

well served, the graylings delicious, but that its ceilings and walls are as thin as paste-board ; that from one room to another one can hear everything ; and that, if you would not be overheard, you must murmur your secrets in the language of the ants. “*Non bis in idem*,” say jurists, which means that one is not obliged to be conscientious twice in the same affair. So I listened this time, and heard the following conversation :

“Are not you going to tell me, then, which of you two first proposed this boating-expedition ?” asked M. de Mauserre, in a dry, almost imperious tone.

“I really cannot tell ; it seemed to me as if the boat got loose of its own accord.”

“And you think this adventurous *tête-à-tête*, with a man whom I love and esteem, but who is no judge whatever in matters of propriety, quite natural, perhaps ?”

“I was wrong, I know,” replied she, humbly. “I forgot my place, and your daughter’s governess begs you, sir, to accept her excuses.”

“I am not just now my daughter’s father ; I am a man who thought he had a right—” He did not finish the sentence, but preferred to begin another. “Is not this the 1st of September ? It is to-day that Tony was to ask your hand. What answer did you give him ?”

“I had no answer to give, sir, because he asked me nothing.”

“A boat is a good place, though, to make love ; one runs no risk of being disturbed. Were his decla-

rations very ardent? Did he make a clever use of the opportunity? Was he bold enough?"

"Sir, are you aware to whom you are speaking?"

"I am inclined to think," continued he, "that your shipwreck was anything but an accident. M. Flamerin only wished to procure himself the pleasure of saving you, and the still greater pleasure of carrying you for ten minutes in his arms. How closely he held you to his heart! Are you sure that you were quite senseless?"

It was her turn now to speak loud, and she raised her voice.

"Well, yes, then, since you wish it. M. Flamerin has taken great liberties with me to-day. What consoles me is that some day I shall perhaps be his wife."

"That shall never be!"

"If he is willing, who can prevent it? You forget that he, at least, is free!"

This last crushed him, and I thought I heard him utter a deep sigh. It may be that I only imagined it; I have, at times, a ringing in my ears.

"If you have no regard for my advice," he continued, more gently, "I trust that you attach some importance to the consent of your family. I can assure you that your father will never sanction this marriage."

"Then you have written to him? How you abuse my confidence!"

"He answered me by return mail that M. Flamerin may perhaps be a good match, but that he would never accept for a son-in-law any other but a serious

man with severe principles, and that men of principles do not generally belong to the class of artists. Such a delicacy of sentiment is the more honorable in him, as he finds himself, it seems, in an embarrassing situation."

"He mentioned the state of his affairs?" she asked, with some emotion.

"I thank him for his confidence. Some one, it seems, has offered him a partnership in an enterprise which would, before long, help him to recover his lost fortune; but they ask of him a deposit of capital which he does not possess."

"And which he asks you to advance him?"

"I should be happy to do something to oblige Mademoiselle Holdenis's father."

"Ah, sir, why do you oblige a daughter to plead against her parent, and to tell you that, however honest and loyal he may be, he is a man of projects and chimeras—that he is unfortunate in all that he undertakes—that you would render him a fatal service in indulging him in his illusions—that you would never see your money again—and that my pride would ever suffer from it? I ask of you, sir, that you refuse this request. I am ready to ask it of you on my knees."

"Calm yourself. I will refuse, if you say so. Let me tell you that you have the noblest, the most delicate sentiments I know of."

"And you, sir, you are kindness itself; and yet, just now you raised a most unjust quarrel."

I fancied I heard him move nearer to her. "Once more, and for the last time: Do you love him, or not?"

"Let us drop this subject, sir. I do not like to dispute with you."

"You refuse, then, to calm my anxiety?" asked he, in an almost supplicating tone.

"I can hardly believe in your anxiety. I should rather believe in your despotism, if you were not so kind."

"And my despotism appears insupportable to you?"

"I am quite ready to be governed by you ; but we live," she added, with a touch of merriment, "in a time when the most submissive of peoples ask their government for explanations."

"You ask explanations?—you will oblige me to tell you what I had promised myself never to reveal? Yes, I am despotic, and my secret— Oh, do not force me to speak, for you have already guessed it!"

There was a long pause—at least it appeared so to me. M. de Mauserre broke it at last, saying: "I do not know what you will think of me. Does my avowal seem odious or ridiculous to you?"

"I do not judge, sir," replied she; "I think I must be dreaming. You are mistaken; it must be an illusion. It is impossible that I, a poor girl, without either mind or personal advantages, could have made myself beloved by a man like you? It will be the everlasting glory of my life; but I prefer the peace I have now lost, to this dangerous honor. I was so happy in your society!—and now, alas! I must bid farewell to-morrow to Les Charmilles. What have you done, sir? How cruel you are!"

"You leave me!" cried he, vehemently. "I will not suffer it!"

"But suppose I should be weak enough to stay, what life shall I lead in a house where I loved to find you, and where, henceforth, prudence and duty both require that I should avoid you? Adieu, now, to that sweet liberty that had so many charms for you and for me!"

"You shall stay, I say; and there will be no need of avoiding me. I promise you that you will never again hear from me another word that shall wound or frighten you. This has been an unfortunate day; let us wipe it from our memory. Let to-morrow be as yesterday; let us both forget that we came together to a cursed place where jealousy made me rave—"

"How can you ask it of me, sir? It may be easy for you to forget, but I cannot. I must distrust my memory."

"I beg of you," said he again, "treat me as a patient whose unreasonableness must be borne with for fear of worse consequences. Consider it an absurd caprice. Be sure that I am the first one to condemn my folly; but it frightens me, and, if you refuse me, I cannot answer for what may follow; I shall commit some great fault, perhaps, that would ruin us all. Promise me that you will not dispose of your hand without consulting me, and that you will not leave Les Charmilles without my consent."

"You terrify me!" said she, almost distracted.

"I shall not leave this room till you have made me such a promise."

“So be it, sir ; but I make it in the hope that you will soon relieve me from it.”

This conversation, madame, irritated me dreadfully ; it was getting unbearable, and I was thinking of putting an end to it, when I heard a door open. A moment after, I heard Madame de Mauserre’s voice saying : “I am glad to see, my dear, that you have good company. She has got quite over it—hasn’t she, Alphonse ?”

“Thanks to your kind care, madame, for which I shall be eternally grateful !” replied Meta. “I congratulate myself on having seen death so closely, since it gave me the opportunity to assure myself of your friendship.”

“Did you doubt it ? Indeed, you have scared us all dreadfully !” And Madame de Mauserre took a new start, and went again over the details of her emotions, for she was fond of repeating things.

I crept away discreetly, and returned into the garden, where for a long time I thought over what I had heard. I did not exactly know what to think of it. There were in me an attorney-general that investigated the matter and a very crafty lawyer that had an answer for everything. The court was in doubt, and demanded an additional inquest. While consulting with myself, I looked at the stars, but they could give me no clew.

The sound of the piano roused me from my reflections. Meta, wrapped in Madame de Mauserre’s cloak, had come down into the parlor, and was playing one of Chopin’s nocturnes. The maestro must have been

thinking of me when he composed it. His music depicted unmistakably the sentiments of a man who is about drowning himself with the woman he loves ; it said, also, "If you will not live with me, I will die with you !" The piano was a wretched village spinet, to which Meta had given eloquence. The proverb is right : There is no bad tool for a workman possessed by the devil. She again looked as if she had the devil in her eyes. I had gone to lean on the window-ledge, and watched her without her seeing me. The habitual softness of her look had been replaced by a murderous vivacity ; but there are sometimes good devils, and, with the help of music, I succeeded in persuading myself that the one lodged in those blue eyes promised me happiness. At times it seemed almost evident, but, when she ceased to play and closed the piano, my doubts came all back again.

^ I slept very badly that night : first, because I was turning over in my mind a problem of transcendental mathematics ; and, secondly, because my neighbor on the right, M. de Mauserre, was on his feet till morning, pacing his room like a caged bear. His sleeplessness consoled mine.

At Lulu's request, it was decided that we should breakfast at Paladru, and not start for home till afternoon. Toward eleven o'clock I went down-stairs into the dining-room. Madame d'Arci was seated near a window watching Madame de Mauserre, who was walking in the garden with Meta. She pointed first at the one and then at the other, saying :

"How can one desire this one, when one has the good fortune to possess the other !"

"You must look upon it differently," I replied. "This woman here can only be appreciated in society, at a *fête*, in a ballroom; but, as there are no balls given at Les Charmilles, you must confess that in the country, and on a rainy day, the other one offers greater resources."

"Add to this," she replied, "that this one is as sincere, as true, as sure of herself, as the other is mysterious, snaky, and sly, and that it is a recognized fact that men more particularly fancy dangerous women."

"There are many people," I said, "who prefer traveling in countries where there are precipices."

At this moment Madame de Mauserre perceived us, and cried :

"You look like conspirators. May we know what you are plotting?"

"We plot," I said, "to bring you back here in ten months, and to give you on Lake Paladru a Venetian *fête*, the programme of which shall be my care."

She thanked me with a motion of her head, and continued her walk.

After having taken care to close the windows, Madame d'Arci subjected me to questions which I did not feel inclined to comply with. I gave her but evasive answers. I recalled to her mind that she and M. d'Arci had granted me a vote of confidence and a credit of time.

"You will have to show your account-book in the end," remarked M. d'Arci, who in the mean time had joined us. "Your intentions are good enough; I only

reproach you for your want of consistency, and for being so good a swimmer."

"I do not wish the death of the criminal; I am working for her conversion."

"Very fine in you to preach to people," he said; "but, if they fall in the water, I don't see any use in jumping after them."

"Let me do as I please, and remember your promise."

"I will do nothing to irritate my father-in-law, and nothing to make Madame de Mauserre uneasy. Does that satisfy you?"

"I shall be quite satisfied if we succeed in averting a crisis which would surely be to the advantage of the enemy."

"Let your mind be easy," said Madame d'Arci. "We have thought over your recommendations, and we are convinced, like you, that as long as Madame de Mauserre suspects nothing she is invulnerable: her confidence is her safety."

I made her a sign to be silent; I had that moment heard in the next room, the door of which was ajar, a slight mouse-tread, and, looking out of the window, I saw that Meta was no longer in the garden.

"Heaven grant that she may not have heard us!" said I to Madame d'Arci. "Believe my experience, the walls of this inn are perfidious."

Two hours later we were on our way home. Whether as a precaution against his son-in-law or against himself, M. de Mauserre had begged his wife to ride in the break with him. I took my seat in the

barouche with my two allies. In going to Paladru I was lost in thoughts ; in returning home I was lost in dreams. Whatever efforts I made to see the landscape, I had constantly before my eyes an angry lake tossing a little boat about, and two large eyes half demented, that stared at me, and seemed to cry, "Love or life !" This is the reason, madame, why I traveled twice through a very fine country without seeing it.

IX.

SEVERAL days passed, during which I was unable to exchange two words with Meta. Her bath had done her no harm; but Lulu had taken cold in coming home, and her governess kept her in her room, where she remained faithfully with her. I was impatiently waiting for her to put an end to this voluntary seclusion, when the crisis I apprehended took place. I must say in justice to M. d'Arci, however, that he had done nothing to bring it about ; it was the enemy himself that provoked it. Really, one could not sufficiently distrust the walls of the Hôtel des Bains.

One evening, a little before dinner, as Madame de Mauserre was sitting alone in her boudoir and thinking of everything but a catastrophe, Mademoiselle Holdenis walked up to her, pale and with a haggard countenance, and threw herself weeping at her feet. She fancied, at first, that Lulu was dead or dying. Meta, however, found strength enough to reassure her on that point.

"But what is it, then, my dear? You frighten me! Have you received any sad news?"

Meta shook her head.

"Did anybody trouble you? Did M. d'Arci again—Tell me, what is it? It must be a very hard case if I do not succeed in comforting you."

"You overwhelm me with kindness!" replied Meta, still weeping. "Treat me as an enemy—turn me out of this house! I must not stay a day longer, for your sake as well as for mine." She could say no more; her sobs stifled her voice.

Madame de Mauserre entreated, questioned, but could only obtain short and obscure answers; but, when one has been for some time in the dark, one begins at last to see; and Madame de Mauserre began gradually to detect the cruel truth.

"Good God!" exclaimed she. "M. de Mauserre loves you, and he has dared to tell you so! Where?—how?—when? What has happened? Tell me all."

"I have already said too much!" stammered Meta.

In saying this she dropped her head upon Madame de Mauserre's lap, who repulsed her violently with both arms; but she soon repented of her anger. "How unjust I am," said she, "to be angry with the courageous friend who opens herself to me and warns me!"

"Ah, madame," replied Meta, "do not praise my courage; rather pity my weakness. M. de Mauserre has wrung from me the promise that I would not leave Les Charmilles without his consent. He commanded, and I, for fear of his displeasure, prom-

ised. Tell him, I beseech you, that I came to you to denounce him. In his anger he will relieve me of this promise."

"No, surely not," replied Madame de Mauserre. "I shall not betray your noble confidence. I shall speak in my name only—shall beseech him."

"Do not beseech him," interrupted she. "Command—exact! Be sure that he can have no very serious feeling for me. It is but a day's caprice, for which your reproaches will make him blush, and which he will hasten to sacrifice to you. Who am I, to win his heart away from you?—you, so good, so beautiful! You have not yet lost all empire over him; at the first word you utter he will repent. Tell him that you suspect something wrong—that my presence here troubles your peace—that, unless he dismisses me, you are resolved to do it. Or, if you have not courage enough to say all this, find a pretext—accuse me of neglecting my duties—of being remiss in the care I owe your dear child. Whatever you may say, I shall not contradict you, and I shall leave your house heart-broken, it is true, but full of gratitude for the dear hand that dismisses me."

Madame de Mauserre stood for a few moments speechless, distracted, dreaming, as one would dream on the edge of a precipice.

"No," replied she at last, "I shall not take the trouble to invent anything; I could not slander a person that has only wronged me against her will. I cannot lie; do not ask it of me. If I speak, I shall tell the truth; and I tell it you at this moment, when

I confess that I admire you, I love you and I hate you all at once."

She burst into tears in her turn. As Meta was endeavoring to console her, she told her to be silent, and, making an effort to kiss her, dismissed her.

We were usually seven at table; on that day we were only two. M. and Madame d'Arci had accepted an invitation to dine with some neighbors; Madame de Mauserre gave out that she had a violent headache, which kept her in her room, and Meta an engagement to take dinner with her young patient in the nursery. M. de Mauserre courteously made up his mind to a *tête-à-tête* with me, and made the best of it. Despite both our efforts, however, the conversation was embarrassing, and dragged; we had so many things to avoid speaking of! After the coffee he left me to take a horseback-ride, which was his habit when he had any thing on his mind.

I had just returned to my room when Madame de Mauserre sent for me. I obeyed the summons immediately, and I had but to look at her to assure myself that she was suffering from something more than a sick-headache. Her face was dejected, her lips tremulous, her eyes dead. She held out her hand to me, and tried to smile. This half-smile, which I shall never forget, seemed to me the image of her ruined happiness.

"The punishment I feared has come at last," she cried; "but it is far more terrible than any I could have imagined."

And, after having made me promise secrecy, she re-

lated her conversation with Meta. I said to her all I could to calm and encourage her, but in vain. I had judged her but too well. This poor soul, so open to every impression, going to extremes in her griefs and joys, was incapable of putting on a cheerful face in trouble. The first blow had knocked her down; she could not get up again.

"Must I tell you how it is with me?" said she, interrupting me. "Just now, when Mademoiselle Holdenis came in, there was such a fatality in her look that I felt at once that a great affliction was at hand. My first thought was that Lulu was dead. God forgive me! but if it had been so, I think I should be less unhappy. My love is dearer to me than my child."

I thought it best to let her talk on. Grief tires itself out in talking, and such fatigue is a relief.

"No, Tony, it is no dream," she said again. "There were but ten more months to wait to become his wife; and God condemns me to go to wreck in sight of the haven. Oh, if you knew all he was to me! I have come to love him a thousand times more than the day when he carried me off—for, Tony, it was he, surely, that carried me off, was it not? He certainly knew what he was about. I resisted him a long time; but he tormented me so that I yielded at last—indeed, more from weakness and pity than from love. You were there; you must know all about it. Yes, at that time he loved me more than I loved him. How different it is now! I have made an idol of him, and it is for this that God punishes me now; he detests all idolatry."

A few moments after she reproached that jealous God for his injustice, his cruelty. Could he not find in all the world a woman more guilty than she to strike? Should he not reserve his great visitations, his great blows, for proud and insolent faults? Why should his glory be interested in crushing a reed?

Then, again, she would all at once exclaim that Meta must be mistaken—that there was too much improbability in her story. “How could she please him, Tony? She is certainly not handsomer than I! Do you not remember that the day when she came to Les Charmilles M. de Mauserre thought her ugly? We even disputed on the subject. Her face rather pleased me. It is an agreeable face, because it has a good and intelligent look; but that is all. Now, really, Tony, do you think she is anything extraordinary? Is there in her something that escapes me? Oh, you men! you have such strange eyes: you make them see whatever you please! They are false witnesses, that impudently lie to justify your infidelities.”

And soon again, changing both tone and language:

“Alas! it is but too plain! I ought to have foreseen that this Meta would cause him to make dangerous comparisons and reflections. She possesses all the talents that I lack: she is active, constantly occupied, and I cannot stand ten minutes on my feet without dropping with fatigue. She understands how to raise a child, how to manage a house; I have never been able to govern anything but a fan—if it is not the fan that governs me. M. de Mauserre can talk with her

about all that interests him ; she is so intelligent, and I am but a bridled goose. She understands him ; she can amuse him, advise him. Yes, truly, it was a serious wife this serious man needed. She has the virtues of the ant, and I am the grasshopper—not even that : the cicada sings, and I don't sing. It so happens that here the ant is the musician, and you know how fond he is of music. But then, again, let us be fair : she flatters him—confess, Tony, that she flatters him ! I ? I adore him, but I have never flattered him ; and, although he is a god to me, I do not constantly repeat to him that he is a great man. I have always thought that there is in flattery a secret contempt for what one loves. I love him, and that is the only science I know, and it is the cause of my ruin. Men never tire of being admired, caressed, flattered ; too constant a love wearies them. I am sure that he has been tired of me a good while. I have no doubt he said to himself, 'She is always the same ;' and, wondering that he should ever have loved me, he conceals from me, out of pity, the mortal satiety his happiness gave him. I did not see it—indeed, if I had not been told, I should never have guessed it. Tony, love is silly ; but what is the use of robbing me of my dream—why open my eyes ? What was the use ? When one has seen the truth thus face to face, one has but one more thought left, and that is, to hide in a desert island or in the other world ! ”

Thus did she talk on without stopping, mixing her complaints, contradicting herself, but coming invariably back to the same conclusion—“ Ah, Tony, how un-

happy I am!"—after which she would again begin to cry.

As she obstinately refused to listen to my consolations, I got angry, and called her a foolish, stubborn woman! I told her, somewhat harshly, that matters were not nearly so desperate as she thought—that the only serious danger was the exaggeration and the extravagance of her grief.

"We shall soon know that," replied she, knitting her brows.

"How? What do you mean to do?"

"I mean to have, this very evening, a talk with M. de Mauserre."

I was on the point of giving her a severe scolding, she seemed so to make it a point to realize my darkest forebodings.

"Oh, you unreasonable woman!" I cried; "do you wish to stake all and lose all?"

"I am determined," she replied, "to understand clearly my situation—to know exactly what I have to expect." And, with a show of logic very surprising in her, she added: "Either it is, as you say, but a caprice of little consequence, and then M. de Mauserre will not hesitate to make the sacrifice I shall ask of him; or, as I fear, the affair is more serious, and, in that case, what is the use of waiting? What should I gain by it? I want to know my fate as soon as possible."

"And do you not know," I replied, "that it needs but just such a tempestuous opposition as the one you intend making to strengthen a man in a caprice, and

drive him to extremities he would never have dared to think of without a shudder? One gets embittered—becomes obstinate—in discussion; pride steps in, and one ends by wishing for what one would never have even dared to desire. If, now, you only had the least talent in manœuvring a little—the least bit of diplomacy! But you are the most awkward woman I have ever known.”

She answered me that I understood her perfectly; that she did not the least pique herself on possessing any skill of that kind; that she was at the same time too awkward and too proud to resort to small manœuvres; that she meant to lose her suit, or gain it honestly. “Besides,” continued she, “Mademoiselle Holdenis, who has behaved in this affair as an honest girl and true friend, advised me to have, as soon as possible, an explanation on the subject with M. de Mauserre.”

“I have no doubt,” I replied, “that Mademoiselle Holdenis has the best intentions; but I doubt that she loves you as much as I do. Believe me, follow my advice before you follow hers.”

“And what do you advise?”

“To be patient, to temporize, to dissemble, and to let your friends act.”

“Oh, Tony,” replied she, with a sad smile, “you ask an impossible thing! A good physician consults his patient’s temperament, and orders only remedies that he can bear. I have never been able to restrain myself, or to dissemble. You must take me for what I am; I cannot help it. Even if I should give up the explanation with M. de Mauserre, my eyes would be-

tray me, and would reveal all my uneasiness, all my jealousy. Abandon me to my miserable fate, and let the stone roll into the abyss, wherein its weight carries it; even if you succeeded in holding it back to-day, it would escape your hand before two more days have passed."

I did not give the matter up, however. I made her the strongest, the most eloquent representations. I begged her, scolded her, insulted her almost, and I was getting very excited, when suddenly the door opened, and M. de Mauserre entered.

The devil in person could not have produced upon me a more disagreeable effect. He looked surprised at seeing his wife in *tête-à-tête* with me, and still more surprised at our agitation and confusion, which we did not succeed in hiding from him.

"I am very glad, my dear," said he, laying his hat on the table, "to see that your headache does not condemn you to solitude."

I do not know what she was going to answer, but I stopped her with a gesture; and I was wrong in doing so, for M. de Mauserre was just stepping up to the mantelpiece, over which there was a mirror. He did not, however, seem to have noticed anything in it, and, bringing up an arm-chair, he sat down, and said, in the quietest tone: "You do not look well, Lucy! Tony has taken his degrees in medicine. He cured me once of an attack of rheumatism, which his learned diagnosis took for an attack of gout. His remedies, it seems, serve in all cases, for he certainly did cure me. Has he felt your pulse?"

"Madame de Mauserre is a little feverish," I replied, "and I think that she needs rest above all; a good night's sleep will make her all right again." And, rising, I looked at him with an air that meant, "I am going, my dear sir; you had better do the same."

"I am not sleepy; I shall not go to bed very soon," cried Madame de Mauserre; and, in her turn, she made a beseeching gesture, which I interpreted, "For Heaven's sake, do not go!"

"Our Paladru excursion has proved anything but a success," remarked M. de Mauserre. "Lulu caught a bad cold by it. Did your headache allow you to go to see her this evening?"

A thrill ran through her whole frame.

"I should certainly have gone to see her," she replied, "if she had been alone; but she is not alone, and the person that attends her—"

I hastened to cut off the rest.

"In fact," said I, playfully, "Mademoiselle Holdenis not only loves her patients, but she is so jealous that she will allow no one to come near them."

There was a pause for two minutes, interrupted only by the ticking of the clock, which, I fancied, had a fever also; its jerky pulse seemed to beat in turns twice a second.

"The night is superb!" remarked again M. de Mauserre. "The moon will be full to-morrow; it is already as round as a cheese."

"I have noticed one thing," replied Madame de Mauserre: "you ride out whenever you seem preoc-

cupied, or wish to hold counsel with yourself. Does anything trouble you this evening?"

"Why, my dear? What trouble could I have?"

"What were you thinking about just now, on the way?"

"I was thinking of your headache, which obliged Tony to dine alone with me; the rest of the time I thought of nothing."

"Alphonse, a man of your disposition thinks always of something or somebody."

He looked at her with surprise.

"Oh, dear madame," cried I, "men of sense are more stupid than you think, and I consider the best of them quite capable of staring for an hour at the moon without thinking of anything whatsoever!" Then, going to the window, "It is certain," I said, "that it is a very beautiful night. Do you feel like coming upon the terrace with me and smoking a cigar, sir?"

He assented, and was approaching Madame de Mauserre to wish her a "good-night," when she said to him:

"One moment, Alphonse; I want to speak with you."

In spite of all the trouble I had taken, I had not succeeded in forestalling the perilous explanation of which I feared so much the issue. Who ever struggled successfully against female obstinacy? I hastened toward the door, and already had my hand on the knob, when Madame de Mauserre called me back, saying, "Stay, Tony; since M. de Mauserre and I have known you, we have never had any secrets from you."

"Stay, my dear sir," said he, sarcastically, "stay ! and do not look so discomfited, otherwise I shall think that you are already acquainted with what Madame de Mauserre has to say."

I had no choice left than to go back to my chair, where I sat down with drooping arms, and eyes fixed on the ceiling, addressing to the cornice a mental oration, in which I besought it to come down on our heads.

"Well, Lucy, what is it you have to say ?" asked M. de Mauserre, who was, no doubt, more uneasy than he cared to let us see. What is the subject of this conversation which you preface so solemnly ? Is it a regular suit ? Shall we write out a protocol ? Do you want Tony to act as clerk ?"

"I have a petition to present to you," murmured she.

"A petition ? What a singular term ! During the six years in which I have had the pleasure of living with you, you have never had a petition to present to me."

"That's what encourages me that you will not reject the only request I have ever made of you. I beseech you to make me a sacrifice which will probably cost you much."

This ingenious way of seizing the bull by the horns filled me with rage, and inwardly I sent all women to the devil. I was not thinking of you just then, madame !

"What's the matter with you, Tony ?" asked M. de Mauserre. Then he looked again straight before him, and waited.

“Will you do me the favor,” continued she, after a moment’s hesitation, “to send Mademoiselle Holdenis away from here?”

He started in his chair.

“Do I understand you?” cried he. “What—the person whom you admire, whom you praise, whom you exalt to the skies, whom you call the pearl of governesses! This is a blast of wind most unexpected, indeed! What on earth has Mademoiselle Holdenis done, I should like to know, to lose all at once your favor? What do you reproach her with?”

“Nothing for which she is herself responsible. You would oblige me a great deal if you would excuse me from explaining my motives. Can you not guess them?”

“Well, let us see; perhaps, in seeking awhile, we may find some reason or other. Are you dissatisfied with her that, by dint of good sense and patient firmness, she has disciplined a child that neither you nor I could bring up, and which, left to our care, would have become insupportable? Does it displease you that she established a spirit of order and government, and has acquired some authority over your domestics? Or do you begrudge me the kind and devoted care she bestowed on me during my sickness, or the pleasure I take sometimes in her conversation? Speak—explain your reasons!”

“I accuse her of having, despite herself, won your love,” replied she, in a tremulous voice.

He was startled, and, in order to conceal the blush that rose to his cheeks, he pushed his chair back and put himself into the shadow of the lamp’s shade.

“What do you mean,” cried he, “by this sudden freak?—and who is the good friend who has rendered you so eminent a service? Do you know him, Tony?”

“No,” I replied, dryly. “I think, as you do, that there are cases when the first duty of friendship is to be silent; and silence has been to me the more easy to keep since I have not noticed anything which it would be worth while to repeat.”

“Tony has fought against my suspicions,” continued she, “but he has not succeeded in quieting me. Alphonse, I do not reproach you with a crime. Confess only that Mademoiselle Holdenis has inspired you with a certain liking—a certain attachment, which I have a right to consider excessive. She has made me acquainted with this ugly evil that is called jealousy. Yes, for the first time in my life am I jealous; and you love me too much—do you not?—to suffer that I should be so long!”

“Say, rather, that I have too just an opinion of your good sense and judgment to suppose that you could long suffer from an imaginary evil, or persist in a caprice which I cannot possibly believe to be a serious one.”

“Alphonse,” said she, raising her voice, “do you promise me that Mademoiselle Holdenis shall leave?”

“Yes, as soon as you shall have found a teacher equal to her, with a heart and mind like hers—so apt in forming and educating your daughter—in teaching her so many things for which I have not the time nor you the inclination or leisure.”

At these words she broke out: “Very well. Ei-

ther Mademoiselle Holdenis or I must leave Les Charmilles !”

“Now, that’s too much !” cried he, stamping his feet. “If I listened to you any longer I should forget myself, and I distrust my anger. I appeal from your unreasonableness of to-day to the good sense you had yesterday, and which, I trust, you will again have to-morrow. Good night, my dear ; I leave you with your confidant. May he give you better, and, above all, more disinterested advice than heretofore !” And, giving me anything but a tender look, he hurriedly left the room, slamming the door after him.

Madame de Mauserre soon after rose also, and walked feverishly up and down the room. The floor echoed her wrath. In passing before the fire, she threw her fan into it. I had never seen her thus. Her wounded pride inflamed her cheeks. She seemed all bristles, or ruffled as an eagle whose nest is interfered with. I thought I could hear the beating of her heart. She walked toward a glass door that opened upon a balcony, at the foot of which was a grass-plot ornamented with a statue of Flora and encircled by a railing curiously worked, representing blackberry-bushes and cactuses ingeniously intertwined, and forming a perfect iron hedge. She looked for a moment at the statue and the railing. I became uneasy, and followed her ; but she soon recovered her natural tenor of mind. Her momentary insanity had terrified her. She stepped back toward the middle of the room, where she burst into tears, and cried as if her heart would break.

“Tony,” cried she, “you have seen him—you have

heard him ! Do you still persist in saying that I am mistaken, and that his heart is still mine ? ”

“ I have seen, and I have heard,” I replied, “ and I declare to you that your greatest enemy is yourself. A rival that had sworn your destruction would not have done you so much harm as you are doing yourself. Bless me, but you deserve to be left to your sad fate ! Yet will I save you despite yourself. I will, and I shall ! ”

She laid both her hands on my shoulder, and looked a few moments into my eyes, as if to read her future in them.

“ I only ask three days,” continued I, disengaging myself ; “ and you shall promise me now that, during these three days, you will not make a motion nor say a word ; for all that you would do or say would turn against you.”

“ Three days ! Does it take any longer for grief to kill a woman like me ! ” Then, in the tone of a child that has been scolded and asks pardon : “ I promise you to be calm,” said she. “ I will—indeed, I will be calm,” and, as if to give me forthwith a specimen of that calm, she cried, as I left her : “ If you fail, Tony, I shall go from here ! I shall—but not by the stairway, that I assure you ! ”

X.

It is a hard thing, madame, to make a good picture ; however, when one tries one may sometimes succeed. It is no less difficult to save a woman from drowning ;

but many a good swimmer has done it. One learns to swim as one learns to paint ; but there is an art that can neither be learned nor taught, because it has no fixed rules, and that is the art of living. Perhaps you have on this subject superior knowledge ; but my own little experience has convinced me that any claim to calculate and to govern the conjunctures of this lower world is a pretension as vain as that of the astrologers, and that the prognostications of sages are no better than gypsy-prophecies. One succeeds sometimes despite common-sense and everything else, and sometimes fails in the face of all that promised success. One man is saved by what was to ruin him, and another is ruined by what was expected to save him. Do not let us ask of philosophy to teach us to govern our destiny or that of others ; it can only serve to disinterest us in our own little affairs ; and, to accomplish this even, old age has to come to its aid ! This is our lot, madame ; but it does not prevent me from firmly believing that you and I will both reach a good old age—see our hundredth birthday—and that to the end we shall be very wise and very happy.

I conclude my remarks, and take up again the thread of my story. Madame de Mauserre had promised me to make an effort to conquer her grief and to give up her headache and seclusion the very next day. This effort, however, appeared too great ; she persisted, despite my advice, in pretending sickness and keeping her room. She could not muster the courage, she said, to meet certain eyes that would read her condemnation.

Madame d'Arci, having gone to see her, soon learned, after a few questions, what had happened. She met me half an hour later, and said :

"Well, what you so feared has come to pass."

"Yes," I said ; "but, fortunately, we have nothing to reproach ourselves with."

"And what are we going to do now?"

"There is a leak in the boat : every one must help stop it."

"You will not act with us?"

"M. d'Arci," I replied, "is too compromising an ally for me. We sing the same air, to be sure, but not on the same key. I return you your liberty, dear madame ; give me back mine."

She left me, somewhat surprised at my cautious manner.

A few hours later Mademoiselle Holdenis came down upon the terrace with her pupil, who had recovered from her indisposition. She sat down upon a bench, and watched her jumping the rope. Madame d'Arci, who was taking a walk with her husband in another part of the garden, left him, and came straight toward Meta, whom she asked for the favor of a moment's conversation.

"Darling," said she to the child, "go and play a little further off ; we will call you back presently."

"If my governess says so," replied Lulu, looking up at Meta, whose eyes intimated, however, that she should go. She obeyed immediately.

"You exercise a strange empire over this little girl," said Madame d'Arci ; "you govern her with a look."

"I love her much, madame; that is all my secret."

"I am persuaded, mademoiselle, that you are as good as you are intelligent, and that is what determines me to ask a favor of you—in appealing to the delicacy of your feelings. You anticipate certainly what I wish to say?"

"No, madame; but I am ready to listen to you."

"There is near by us a woman who is very unhappy: you are the involuntary cause of her sufferings. The attentions my father pays you, whether right or wrong, have made her jealous of you; and, as her impressions are very strong, she has conceived fears which, no doubt, are exaggerated. Will you do nothing to give her back her peace of mind and happiness?"

"What can I do, madame?"

"Leave as soon as possible, and thus take away with you our esteem and regrets."

"Did M. de Mauserre commission you to dismiss me? In that case I should obey most gladly; for, believe me, madame, I long to leave Les Charmilles. I, too, am very unhappy here."

"My father has charged me with no message, mademoiselle."

"Then pray go and ask him, and obtain for me the permission to leave. I shall be most grateful to you for it."

"What need is there for you to await such an order, mademoiselle? Does your heart not give it you?"

"If you were better informed, madame, you would know that, in a moment of trouble, when I was think-

ing of going away, M. de Mauserre obliged me to stay, and made me promise to await his consent."

"You astonish me, mademoiselle! Can such a promise detain you an hour longer in a house where, without wishing it, you have sown dissension, trouble, and grief?"

"I have promised, and I never lightly break my word."

"I should have thought," continued Madame d'Arci, getting excited, "that our duty commands us to sacrifice small obligations to greater ones."

"Perhaps we have not the same ideas about duty," replied she, gently. "You have your conscience, I have mine."

"Yours is a very mysterious conscience, mademoiselle. Madame de Mauserre's despair leaves it strangely quiet."

"You are rash in your judgments, madame. Ask Madame de Mauserre; she will tell you whether I am indifferent to her troubles. And, since you seem to think that I owe you an account of my conduct, know, madame, that it is I who begged her to solicit and obtain my dismissal."

"Indeed, mademoiselle! Do you know what I should have done in your place? I should have been silent, and should have gone."

"Ah, madame! whatever I might do, I should always be at fault in your estimation. The superb justice of the Countess d'Arci would not stoop to consider the rights of a poor girl who has nothing and is nothing. Happily, there is a Supreme Judge above,

who looks with an impartial eye both upon the great and the little."

"But," again said Madame d'Arci, whom this obstinate gentleness irritated more and more, "if Madame de Mauserre does not obtain his consent—"

"She will obtain it, never fear!" broke in Meta, with a half-smile. "Have but a little patience. To-morrow, or the day after, I shall have sunk back into my nothingness, and you will be for ever delivered of my importunate presence."

"But suppose that Madame de Mauserre, who is so far behind you in ingenuity and persuasiveness, and who understands nothing in the art of gaining a suit by skillful insinuations—suppose, I say, that she goes awkwardly about it, and meets with a rebuff; may I ask what you intend to do then?"

"I shall pray to God, and ask him on my knees, and he will answer me," she added, raising her eyes to heaven.

M. d'Arci had meanwhile come near, and, taking part in the conversation, he said, bluntly:

"I know your God, mademoiselle. He is the God of intriguers and hypocrites; and when you have asked this very obliging God on your knees, he will be very likely to answer: 'Don't go, pussy; there are here in this place two hundred thousand pounds income to lay hold on—a nice little fortune which you may take'—weeping, of course, for your tears come easily; and to take is such a sad thing, that one must naturally weep over it. Zounds! I wish I could see on this terrace

some honest atheist, that I might have the pleasure of kissing him on both cheeks !

"My God holds blasphemy in horror, monsieur," replied she, rising from her seat, "but he always forgives those who indulge in it when they do not know what they say."

As she was going, he held her back by the arm, for he meant to have his say out ; but at this moment Lulu, who had got into a thicket, uttered a cry. Her governess ran to her. "A viper!" cried the child, starting back pale with terror, and pointing to the most innocent of blind-worms.

"Don't be frightened," said Meta, taking her by the hand. "Vipers have flat heads, and do not look so friendly."

"Don't trust the natural history of your governess, Lulu," exclaimed M. d'Arci. "I know vipers that have no flat heads, and whose looks are all sweetness."

Meta interrupted him with a groan, and, fixing upon him her eyes filled with tears, she said :

"Monsieur, when we are alone I am willing to put myself at your disposal ; but, I beseech you, do not insult me before this child."

And she took Lulu away, who, seeing her weep, turned upon M. d'Arci, and, looking at him with the angry air of an Eliakim before whom Jehovah is insulted, cried :

"You wicked man, you make her cry ! I shall tell of you."

As on the day before, neither Mademoiselle Holdenis nor Madame de Mauserre appeared at dinner. The

meal was short and silent. After leaving the table I went to take a walk through the fields. Determined to have that very evening a decisive understanding with Meta, I resolved to seek her in her impenetrable nursery, and, if needs be, force my way through the window ; but I intended to wait till Lulu should be asleep.

The park had two entrances : one on the main road which led to Cremieux, the other into a wild ravine, the melancholy and nakedness of which pleased M. de Mauserre particularly, as it recalled to him certain places in the Campagna around Rome. It was into this solitude that he would of evenings carry his reveries. He was in the habit of crossing the park and escaping through a little door closed by a bolt. By dint of as much perseverance as cunning, he had, through much painstaking, taught his horse to push back the bolt, and he was more proud of this feat than of his "History of Florence." From the path which I followed I could see him riding slowly down the main avenue. Absorbed in thought, he did not notice me. I allowed him to get ahead of me, and when I reached the little gate he had already disappeared.

A few moments later I was resting on the bank of a ravine at the edge of a deserted pathway. At my right I could see the immensity of the plain vanish into the gray of the approaching night. The last rosy lights of the setting sun were gradually dying away in the west. A few stars showed themselves already, and the whole earth seemed hushed under the silence of the heavens, with no other noise but the song of a

cricket and the sound of a scythe a belated mower was yet sharpening. Before me rose a hollow rock, whose sharp crests, crowned with Notre-Dame thistles, projected themselves on the horizon. Under the doubtful twilight the most insignificant objects assume a sense, a certain air ; they take attitudes and make gestures. Those thistles before me seemed to understand my thoughts and give me their opinion. The moon, too, came by-and-by to join in our conversation. It rose in the space between two mountains. I saw it appear at the end of a willow avenue, the branches joining above it and forming a daïs. I imagined that it detached itself from the sky and hastened toward me, and that the willows trembled as it approached. All of which means, madame, that my mind was not in its usual state of composure ; for I am not in the habit of thinking that the moon turns so easily out of its course for me. I stretched myself on the back of the ditch and closed my eyes. Any one passing by would have supposed me asleep ; but I was not asleep. I was thinking how to strengthen myself in a resolution of which I had to calculate the chances. Suddenly I jumped up, and found myself saying : "To the devil with all this caviling ! I am in love—nothing is more certain ; and it is almost as certain that I am loved in return."

I had just returned into the park through the little gate, when I perceived, about a hundred steps from me, a shadow coming rapidly toward me. It ran rather than walked. I slipped behind the trunk of a tree and watched its approach. It was Meta. She was

wrapped in a brown cloak, the hood of which she had drawn over her head, and she was carrying a little traveling-bag. When she came up to where I was and was about to pass, I suddenly left my hiding-place and stopped her. She started back affrighted.

"Pray," said she, "let me pass."

"Where are you going so fast?"

"Right before me. I fly from a house where I am misjudged, hated, insulted. You do not know what they have said to me this morning. Why were you not there? You would have barked at me with the rest of the hounds."

"I have never insulted you," I replied. "I have scolded you hard, perhaps. And have I not a right to do so, since, despite my reason, my suspicions, my just anger—in spite of all, I am foolish enough to love you still?"

A sigh, or rather a half-stifled cry, escaped her.

"Do not mock me," she stammered, "and let me pass."

"No. I promised myself to have an understanding with you this evening. Thanks to this favorable chance, I shall not be obliged to break in your door or scale your windows. One thing, however, troubles me now."

She questioned me with a look.

"Why," said I, "did you choose this road to leave the house?"

"Because I thought I would not be likely to meet any one here."

"I beg your pardon; you were, on the contrary,

quite sure to meet some one who, you know, is in the habit of riding here every evening."

"I should have known very well how to avoid him," she replied, quickly.

"I should be glad to think so; otherwise those barkers you speak of might accuse you of wishing thereby to secure yourself a triumphant return."

She cried out, with a tone of indignation, "Don't you see how you, too, insult me!"

"Being jealous, I am also suspicious. And now you may continue your journey, if you like. I keep you no longer, but I shall know what to think of it."

She threw her bag violently on the ground and dropped on a bench. "O God!" she exclaimed, "everything seems to be impossible!"

I sat down by her, and said, "There is one thing possible, which would set all right, and that would be—"

"Oh, speak! I am so tired of the life I lead, that I promise to do anything you may advise."

"Well—bless me!—this possible solution would be, to marry me."

She started, and, raising her head slowly, looked at me with an air of stupor, and whispered, "I would give a great deal to know if you speak seriously."

"You are always doubting my seriousness," I replied, gently passing my arm around her waist. "I can't take these elegy tones and bending attitudes; I was not born a weeping-willow. But, on the other hand, I can give myself the testimony that I have never deceived anybody. You know me; you know

that I am simple-minded, and have but one word. My conduct has been clear; I thought I detected something equivocal in yours, and swore to give you up; but since the day when you tried to drown me in the lake I have adored you! May my reason forgive me! The expression of your face in executing this master-stroke haunts me, pursues me. I see it in all my dreams. You did not succeed in dying with me, so let us go back to our first plan, which was by far the more sensible one, and let us live together and try to make each other as happy as possible. I told you once that I had never been in love except with Velasquez. I retract that speech. I love you as much as I do him, although in a different fashion, since it never came into my mind to marry him. My explanations may not, perhaps, be very clear, but my ideas, I am sure, are quite so. Now, would it be possible for you, on your side, not to adore me—I am not so exacting—but to love me a little, and to love no one but me? I ask you, for the last time, if you will consent to become my wife? and I promise, by the moon that looks upon us, to be a kind, amiable, good-natured husband. Are we agreed? Silence gives consent. Only I wish that this affair be decided this evening, for I do not mean to leave you any longer to your hesitations, nor remain myself twenty-four hours longer in my perplexities. You shall go back to the house now, where, after having thought the matter over, you shall write me a letter in which you shall answer me with a ‘No’ or a ‘Yes’ as clear, as precise, as tender as possible. Do not fear to exaggerate somewhat your sentiments or

expressions ; I shall not take advantage of your hyperboles. I am no coxcomb. To-morrow I shall present myself before M. de Mauserre with my letter in my hand, and shall say to him, squarely and roundly : “Mademoiselle Holdenis had promised not to leave you. She is no longer her own mistress ; she belongs to a certain individual who is to marry her, and this individual is myself. She will, therefore, start at once for Geneva, where she will await the day of our marriage.”

I stopped a moment and listened ; I thought I had heard the neighing of a horse. “If you do not like to write,” I continued, “there will be some one passing here presently, to whom we can explain the matter, and—”

“Oh, no !” exclaimed she, “I do not wish to see him or speak with him. There is something in him that overawes me, frightens me. I would rather write. God be with us !”

In saying these words she rose hurriedly ; then, bending over me, and with her two hands sealing hermetically both my eyes, she gave me on my mouth a long kiss which made my head twist round like a Nuremberg top. She allowed me to enjoy the kiss, but would not let me see it. When she withdrew her hands, and I reopened my eyes, it seemed to me as if there were two or three moons in the sky, and that they poured over all the trees of the park a silver rain, that fell from branch to branch and leaf to leaf like sleet.

Meanwhile she had picked up her traveling-bag

and lightly hurried off. I ran after her. After a few steps I stopped, and, putting my hand on my heart, that beat as if it would break, "Tony," said I to myself, "don't do heedlessly a reasonable thing."

I had scarcely recovered from my emotion, when I perceived, upon the gravel of the walk, the shadow of a horse and its rider, and I heard a voice saying to me, "Is that you, Tony? I am very glad to have met you, for I have something to say. This morning they have allowed themselves, at the house, grossly to insult a person whom I esteem, and who has a right to my protection, since she belongs to my household. It seems that they have formed the plan of driving her from here by dint of ill-treatment and persecution. Be so kind as to hint to the inventor of this little plot that he plays a hard game, and that he runs the risk of driving me to extremes, which I shall perhaps be the first to regret." Then, without awaiting my reply, he spurred his horse, and the thicket soon concealed him from my sight.

In the course of the same evening Mademoiselle Holdenis called upon Madame de Mauserre. Finding the bolt drawn, she knocked timidly, and murmured : "Open, madame, I beg of you ! I bring you good news."

The door opened. "Good news !" replied Madame de Mauserre, who could not control her feelings sufficiently to take the hand Meta held out to her ; "and it is you that bring it ?"

"How pale you are, madame ! How sorry I am to find you so ! But presently, when you shall have

heard me, the roses will come back to your cheeks, and you will smile again as before. Know, then, madame— But I am so confused that I do not know where to begin.”

She succeeded, however, at last in finding the beginning, and from one thing to another she related the conversation she had had with me, and the conclusion we had come to. Madame de Mauserre was overcome with joy. She pressed her to her heart as if she meant to smother her.

“How I love you, my dear!” she exclaimed; “and you deserve it well, first because you are a heart of gold, honest and frank, and above all because you love Tony—for you love him, do you not? And you will marry him? Why did you keep it from me?”

“Pardon, madame, but I could not disentangle my own feelings. I hesitated, questioned—was not sure I was loved. The first time he asked me to be his wife it was in such a half-jesting tone that I thought he was laughing at me. Another day he spoke to me so harshly that I fancied he despised me. I could not believe him, but to-day I have no more doubts. Good-by, madame; I wished to procure you a happy night, and I have succeeded, I think.”

She was going; Madame de Mauserre called her back.

“But this letter, which is to save me and repair all—is it written?”

“I have such a poor head!” she replied. “I have just been a whole hour at my table, trying in vain to collect my ideas, which dance around me like rebel-

lious schoolboys. Besides, my hand trembled so that the writing would hardly have been legible. I had better sleep over my emotion, and write to-morrow."

"To-morrow?"

"Have no fears; he shall get my letter before noon."

"No, my dear, you must write to-night; the to-morrow is not ours yet. I will help you. One succeeds sometimes with a little assistance; and, if your hand trembles, I will be your secretary; you will have but to recopy it."

Directly, despite Meta's protestations and resistance, she brought upon the table her inkstand, pen, and writing-desk, from which she took a quire of rose-paper.

"See," she said, "what pretty paper! It will inspire us, for the epistle must be a very loving one—must it not?"

"He told me to make it as tender as possible," replied Meta, smiling, "and that's what troubles me. I am so awkward in this kind of literature."

"But I shall help you! Now I hold the pen: how shall we begin? I am going to write, 'Tony, I adore you!'"

"Oh, madame, pray spare my pride!" said she, holding back her hand. "And then, you call him Tony. You have the right, but I have never taken that liberty with him."

"You must take it to-day," replied Madame de Mauserre. "Don't forget that the letter we are going to compose is what is called in diplomacy an 'open letter.'"

After many tergiversations and discussions, the missive was finally written, and read as follows :

“What surprise and joy have prevented me from saying, I now write to you, Tony. But why must I write? I thought I had told you all, without saying a word. Did I dream that one evening we sat together—that the neighing of a horse startled us—that I escaped from your arm around my waist—and that, before flying— That kiss, Tony, was it not an answer? Do you need another? And is it true that you distrust me? Be satisfied, then; this letter shall inform you, in case you do not know it, that I love you—that my heart has been wholly yours for a long time. Tony, I abandon to you the care of my destiny. I am ready to follow you to the end of the world. Do not deceive me. The day you are ready I will be your wife.”

After having written the last word of the copy, which she read over aloud : “Excellent!” cried Madame de Mauserre. “Now the date. Quick to work, my pet! Here is the paper. Does the hand still tremble?”

“No, madame,” replied Meta; and she dipped the pen resolutely into the inkstand.

“A moment!” observed Madame de Mauserre; “I forgot that the paper is stamped with my monogram. If he noticed it, he might see that I have had something to do with it—that I have prompted you. You can copy it in your room, by-and-by. Are you sure you remember all, or do you want to take the little bit of rose-paper with you?”

“Oh, no, madame!” replied Meta, gayly, “I know my romance by heart. Shall I recite it?” And, so saying, she twisted the sheet of rose-paper into a paper curl, and was about to burn it at the light, when Madame de Mauserre took it from her and put it into her desk.

“I am still afraid that you may change your mind. This draught is a witness, and I mean to keep it till to-morrow, to confront you with it if your copy should not be exact. If needs be, I shall show it to Tony. Now, you are obliged to copy it faithfully. You must swear it, by all the tears you have cost me!”

Thereupon she took both her hands, pressed them, and cried, as the door closed upon her, “Either I am much deceived, or ere long my patient will be cured, and I shall be the most comforted of women.”

XI.

THE next day was one of such great emotions that I do not like to recall it. Fortunately, there are not many such in my life. I woke in the best of humors; everything looked bright, especially people about getting married. I felt satisfied with myself, with my conduct, with my wisdom, with the engagement I had entered into. Far from regretting my lost liberty, I blessed the collar I had myself put on my neck.

I waited the whole morning for Meta's letter. I wondered she should keep me waiting for it, but I

was not uneasy ; I felt as sure of her heart as of my own. I had prepared my speech to M. de Mauserre—preface, exordium, and peroration. It was from one end to the other a piece of admirable eloquence, and looked to me of irresistible effect.

Twelve o'clock struck. I had not received anything yet, and I began to grow impatient. I went out. In passing before M. de Mauserre's room I saw in it a large trunk, which his servant was packing full of clothes. This trunk gave me something to think about, and I arrived at the conclusion that M. de Mauserre, having made, as he awoke, wise reflections, had settled in his mind that traveling was the best way to forget, and had forthwith resolved to visit the country where the oranges grow and where no Metas are. This determination appeared to me honorable and worthy of him. I was surprised to find Madame de Mauserre in the dining-room, who had at last broken her seclusion. She was pale, and looked serious, but her eyes were hopeful.

I was not mistaken in my conjecture. M. de Mauserre announced to us at luncheon that he had researches to make in the archives at Florence, and would set out for Italy that evening or the next day. M. d'Arci kept sufficient mastery over his feelings to conceal the extreme satisfaction this news gave him. I do not know what exclamation might not have escaped Madame de Mauserre if my eye had not met hers and enjoined silence ; so she remained quiet. As for Meta, I thought I detected a change in her humor and countenance. She had a long face ; there was motion about

her eyebrows ; her eyes looked askance ; her voice became tremulous, and as if muffled. I knew from experience the singular undulations of her disposition ; twice already had this quicksand drifted under me. But I felt that day as merry as a lark, and drove from my mind all sinister forebodings.

After luncheon I found myself alone with Madame de Mauserre in the parlor.

"I fancy you are content now !" said I.

"How could I be so, Tony ? He must love her very much to have to travel in order to alleviate his chagrin."

"Dear me !" I replied, laughing, "you are over-exacting, indeed ! Deprive Lulu of her doll, and you would surely allow her to pout for twenty-four hours. At certain moments great men are Lulus."

"And Heaven knows when he will come back !"

"Oh, he will come back, madame, as soon as Mademoiselle Holdenis shall be no longer here."

"Ah, Tony, I have a great mind to ask him—"

"Ask nothing—accept what he offers. Go back to your room, I beg of you, and, when he comes to bid you good-by, kiss him tenderly, without appearing either to blame or approve him. The one would be as fatal as the other."

"I shall do what you say, for are you not my deliverer ? It is you who have caused him to fly from the peril."

"You are mistaken ; I have done nothing to bring about this resolution."

"Why, yes, you have ! Mademoiselle Holdenis told

me all. Why should you be so reserved with me? Confess that—”

She was interrupted. M. de Mauserre came abruptly in, and looked at us both with a somewhat suspicious air. This look troubled her. She became embarrassed, and went out. He then came up to me, and said :

“I am sorry, Tony, always to disturb you in your mysterious confabulations with Madame de Mauserre, but I have a rather uncourteous communication to make, which much embarrasses me.”

He looked so unhappy that I answered him :

“What can embarrass you so? I should find it very hard to refuse you anything to-day.”

“I went to see Mademoiselle Holdenis this morning, to announce to her my departure, and to beg her to remain here until Madame de Mauserre should have found some one to take her place. She consented, out of love for my daughter, but on one condition.”

“Which is—if you please?”

“That you will return this very evening to Paris, because—and these are her own words—it would be impossible for her to stay one day longer at Les Charmilles with you.”

I remained dumbstruck. I was beside myself between doubt and anger. For two or three seconds it seemed to me as if the floor rocked or rolled under me like the deck of a ship at sea.

M. de Mauserre took a malicious pleasure in my discomfiture.

“What have you done to her?” he continued. “I

thought you were on the best of terms with each other ? I questioned her, but she intrenched herself in an impenetrable silence."

"I don't know, any more than you," I replied, trying to recover my composure and straighten my face. "It does not matter ; I shall be gone this evening."

"Without ill-feeling, I hope ?" he said, with a return of kindness. "I talk freely to you, as I would to an old friend. But look here ! do better—wait till to-morrow, and come with me to Florence."

"Oh, no !" I replied. "I have no researches to make at the archives, and I long to get back to my studio in Paris."

Thereupon he left me, and as soon as he was gone I ran and knocked violently at the nursery-door. No answer. I persisted, but the bolt was drawn, and resisted all my efforts. I then went to breathe awhile on the terrace ; I stood dreadfully in need of it. At the farthest end of the kitchen-garden I perceived Lulu, who was accompanied only by her maid. I concluded, from that, that her governess must be in her bedchamber, engaged in some business or other. I returned to her door, but did not knock. M. de Mau-serre was with her, and I heard them talk in a pretty high key. I came back an hour later ; this time I entered, but the bird had flown. I went up-stairs, to my room, and commenced to pack. All at once I caught sight of my tormentor from the window. She had gone down-stairs to seek her pupil in the park, and was bringing her back into the house. I flew down, reached the front steps as she was coming up,

and met her scolding a chambermaid in an unusually commanding tone. Her accustomed meekness was gone, and her face, her brows, her Semiramis-attitude, struck me with wonder. When she had done scolding, she watched awhile a hawk that hovered over the house and uttered sharp cries. Her lips were tightly closed, her nostrils inflated. It seemed to me as if she, too, scented a prey, and that there was in her heart a hungry hawk, which, like the one above, shook its wings and screamed for food. She ascended the steps as if taking them by storm; her elastic, conquering feet, seemed to say, "This place is mine!" I was leaning against the banister with folded arms, and was waiting for her. She looked at me as if I had been a total stranger—as if she had never seen me, never spoken to me, and was trying to guess who I might be. None but an idle story-teller could have pretended that the evening before she had given me so ardent a kiss on my lips. I had not the strength to utter a word. She passed by. It would have been easier for me to strangle her than speak to her.

As I was hastening back to my room, Madame d'Arci, who was much agitated, took me by the coat-button, and, drawing me into the parlor, asked, in a tremulous voice, "What is going on, do you think?"

"I don't know, and the devil take me if I care to know!" I replied. "Everything is possible—even the impossible."

I tried to get away, but she held me back. "Pray listen to me, and advise me. Just now, with M. d'Arci's assent, I went to my father to offer to accompany

him to Florence. Mademoiselle Holdenis was with him; they have been together the whole afternoon, now in her room, now in his. In crossing the hall I heard him say, 'Furnish me the proof, and I promise you that I will take no revenge.' On seeing me he stopped short, and when I told him what had brought me, he begged me to go, adding, 'I have given up my journey!'"

"I tell you that the only thing I just now wonder at is, to find myself still here!" I replied, with anger, "But I shall not stay here much longer. This house has become odious to me. I am tired of women that cry all the time, and have to be consoled with lies. I am tired of women that lie, and of spending my time in making out their riddles. I am tired of seeing two men, that are not absolutely fools, led about by the nose by a pretty-faced cheat and intriguer. I am tired of my blunders and other people's blunders—tired, in short, of hearing conjugated, every day, the verb 'to go': She shall go, I shall go, we shall go—and nobody going but me. The deuce! Stay who may in this devilish house, but I shall not risk my cheerfulness, my youth, and my talent here any longer."

I immediately ordered one of the servants to engage a carriage for me at Cremieux, and returned to my room, determined to stay there quietly until my departure, and bid no one good-by. However, I had no sooner strapped my trunks, than it seemed to me impossible to leave without knowing what had actually taken place, and what pretext Meta could have invented to get rid of me; why M. de Mauserre, after

having announced to us his departure, had so suddenly given it up; what the words meant, "Furnish me the proof, and I promise you that I will take no revenge." I began to suspect, under all this, some dark machination, and lost myself in conjectures. The sun had just set. I started to see M. de Mauserre, and entered his rooms without even knocking; but he was not there. I learned from a servant that he had just gone down to his wife. I went in search of him, and a very unexpected scene was awaiting me there.

Madame de Mauserre had conformed to my instructions in every point; she had spent the whole afternoon in her room without exchanging a word with any one, and had only gone out to take a short ride. She was just coming back and had her hat still on, when M. de Mauserre entered.

"Alphonse," said she to him, "I hope to learn from yourself that you have given up your journey."

"You shall learn from me," he replied, "how a man may be very sure of his intentions, and may yet be subject to changing his mind three times during the day. This morning I meant to start alone; two hours ago I thought of taking Lulu with me—"

"And her governess?" interrupted she, quickly.

"Perhaps. But don't be uneasy; I am obliged to stay here on important business."

"What business, Alphonse? What's the matter?"

"This morning, then," continued M. de Mauserre, striving to be calm, "when I communicated my project to Mademoiselle Holdenis, she could not restrain

an expression of anxiety, and gave me to understand that I did wrong in going away. A moment later, when I requested her to stay a few days longer at Les Charmilles, she assented, on condition that M. Flamerin should leave the house this evening and return to Paris. You must confess that there was enough in all this to excite my curiosity. I went back to her this afternoon, urged her to answer me, and overwhelmed her with questions. For more than an hour I cross-questioned her, till she complained that I tortured her. At last I succeeded in extorting her secret from her. But a simple affirmation did not suffice; I wanted proofs. In order to obtain them, I made her a solemn promise that I would not take vengeance, and that I should leave without mentioning the matter to you. Such promises are not binding; I should never be able to keep them. You know who I am, and what M. Flamerin may expect from me."

"Do I hear right?" she exclaimed. "You mean to take vengeance on M. Flamerin because he has the audacity to love Mademoiselle Holdenis, and wishes to marry her?"

"This comedy is ended, and cannot serve you any longer. Tony managed matters so well that I got on a wrong scent; but I tell you that at this moment I know all, and that I have in hand the proof that he is your lover."

She stood speechless, unable to believe her senses, and wondering whether she was not dreaming. She repeated, mechanically: "You have the proof that Tony— Alphonse, are you in your senses?" Sud-

denly a ray of light shot through her mind ; she ran to her table and hurriedly opened her desk.

"I am ahead of you ; here is what you are looking for," said M. de Mauserre ; and, with these words, he drew from a note-book the dangerous pink paper and presented it to her.

Madame de Mauserre told me afterward that at that instant she felt her soul tearing in two, divided, as it was, between the horror of a perfidy her imagination was unable to grasp, and the crazy joy to find that M. de Mauserre still loved her enough to be jealous. When she recovered from her stupor, she flew to the bell-rope and rang feverishly, saying, "Mademoiselle Holdenis shall come ; I mean that she herself shall explain all."

A few minutes after Meta appeared, and Madame de Mauserre wondered, as I had done before, at the sudden change visible in her behavior and face. With her head thrown back, her firm-set lips, her rapid and laconic speech, the hard expression of her eyes, she had all the attitude of a person who had just taken a bold decision, and was resolved to play with Fate a game she was determined to win, cost what it might. Madame de Mauserre examined her an instant in silence. "I have sent for you, my dear," she said, "to inquire about your marriage."

"What marriage, madame ?—with whom ?"

"With M. Flamerin. Is it given up ? Projects are made and given up in this house with an unheard-of facility."

"I knew nothing of this one, madame."

“You do not remember that yesterday you had in the park a close conference with Tony—that he asked for your hand—that it was agreed between you two that you should write to him, and that your letter should be shown to M. de Mauserre?”

“I really do not know what you mean, madame.”

“Is it I speaking to you?—is it you that answer me? Is it false that last evening we composed together the draught of this letter—that we were seated, you and I, at the table—that I held the pen, and that I wrote under your dictation?”

“Surely, madame, you must have dreamed all this!”

Madame de Mauserre approached Meta, looked her deep into the eyes, and for the first time saw their bottom; and what she saw was enough to make her start back. “Oh, mademoiselle,” she cried, “you frighten me! Who and what are you?”

“This is indeed asking too much!” said M. de Mauserre. “How can you expect her to support you with her testimony in so unlikely an explanation? You should have intimated it to her, and arranged it with her beforehand.”

At this moment I entered the room, and cast about me wondering eyes, trying to guess what scene was being played between this man, who affected calmness so ill, and these two women, of whom one looked demented, and the other presented the pallor and fearful rigidity of a statue.

“Come, Tony!” cried Madame de Mauserre. “The most extraordinary things are taking place here. Imagine that you are my lover—that Mademoiselle Hol-

denis affirms it, and that M. de Mauserre believes it !”

I took up the pink paper she was pointing at. After having read it, I cried, “The man who could seriously believe that this letter was written to me by Madame de Mauserre must be insane !”

She then came up to me, and in a broken voice commenced a story I had great difficulty in following. M. de Mauserre interrupted us. “This is not the place to explain matters,” he said to me in an authoritative tone; and in a threatening key added, “Let us go out and settle this affair face to face.”

Madame de Mauserre ran to place herself between the door and him. “Mademoiselle Holdenis,” said she to Meta, “will you maintain to the end a lie which puts two lives in danger ?”

I, too, approached Meta. She could not bear my look, which was to her apparently as terrible as that of a judge in his gown. I saw her face gradually relax and lose its firmness. Her action had been too high-strung and exacting for her courage; she was giving way under it. I fancied I was witnessing the crumbling down of a strong will, and I saw the moment when her limbs would support her no longer, and when she would fall on her knees. She succeeded, however, in keeping herself up, and preserved, amid this general exhaustion of power, a sombre pride.

“Do not look at me, madame,” said she to Madame de Mauserre, who had again approached her; “do not speak to me, or I shall confess nothing. Despite all my efforts, I could never love you. I hate you! You are

rich, I am poor ; you are handsome, I am not ; and your kindness has been full of concealed insolence. I often thought that it would be a meritorious act to deprive you of your happiness, which is the unjust reward of a fault, and which you are wrong in showing so much. Last night your joy pained me, and I left you with bitter feelings." Then, turning to M. de Mauserre : "Yes, sir, the vengeance you meditate would be a crime, for the statement I gave you was a falsehood. But are not you guilty of the same, in giving me your word of honor that you loved me enough not to take vengeance?"

In saying these words she started from the wall against which she was leaning, and crossed the room to reach the door. In passing before me she uttered a cry of despair, and stammered, "Why was I not allowed to die, a week ago, in Lake Paladru?"

When she was gone M. de Mauserre remained a few moments motionless ; there was no color in his face, and he could not speak. Was he glad, or sorry ? I fancy he was both. He found himself in the state of mind of a man who has made a big error in his account-book, and who goes over his reckoning, wondering how it was possible he could have made such a mistake—both confused at his stupidity and glad to have found it out in time. His eyes were fastened to the floor. He raised them, and fixed them a moment upon the door through which had just gone and disappeared forever a dream, one which he perhaps regretted. I imagine he was considering by what means, or how, he could replace it. Human nature has such a horror of

a void ! It is possible, also, that I presume too much, and that he did not exactly know what to think or to do. It is certain, however, that he came to himself, embraced me, and said, in a tremulous voice, "Will you ever forgive me ?"

"Never !" I replied. "Don't expect it. I intend to write forthwith a book entitled, 'About the Stupidity of Sensible Men.'" And I added, "But here is one whose indulgence you need more than mine."

And, taking him by the hand, I led him toward Madame de Mauserre. She looked at him a long while with an undefinable smile, and, breaking into tears, fell on my neck, crying, "I must forgive him, my good Tony, for was he not going to kill you !"

XII.

I KNOW, dear madame, that you do me the kindness to think me talented, but you have always doubted my good sense. I do not know what you will presently think on this subject ; but I am prouder of what I am going to relate next, than of the best of my pictures.

M. d'Arci had spent the evening in my chamber. He knew all, and was so excited that he did not know where he was. "Thank Heaven, we have escaped it ! True it is, then, that the wicked often destroy their own work. Indeed, Mademoiselle Holdenis is more candid than I supposed her to be ; she innocently brings together what she had intended to disjoin forever. How is it that she did not understand that

jealousy often survives love, and in certain cases resuscitates it? The man the most indifferent to his property will involuntarily put his hands to his pockets when he hears the cry of 'Stop thief!'"

"And what is more," I answered, "M. de Mauserre has made by this the experience that it is not so easy as one thinks to get rid of remembrances. We fancy them dead, and all at once they start out unexpectedly from some obscure corner, and take us by the throat. The better way is to keep friends with them."

"Perhaps," he replied; "but we have, indeed, made a narrow escape. Ah, the witch!" And he relieved himself with a furious rubbing of hands.

He left me toward midnight. All that had been going on within me and around me, during the last twenty-four hours, had so excited me, that, unable to sleep, I gave up going to bed altogether. I paced and paced again round my room, and resolved to keep up the exercise till morning. I wished particularly to witness Meta's departure from the top of my tower. I felt that not till then could I expect to recover my equanimity; that, to breathe freely again, I had to see with my own eyes the carriage that took away this enemy of my repose disappear behind the trees, and be sure that she was gone. It was the most unpleasant chapter in the book of my life that I was reading, and I was in haste to turn the page.

Thus I walked up and down, trying to think of my Boabdil's cloak, or of the theory of complementary colors, and caught myself again and again thinking of something else. At times I leaned on the window-

ledge, and contemplated the clumps of trees that stood out against the starry sky, a confused row of roofs, and two weathercocks creaking in the wind. It seemed to me as if the weathercocks and trees and roofs felt some great commotion, and were endeavoring to recover from it, and that the whole house looked like a chicken-coop that had just been visited by a weasel.

All at once I heard a scratch at my door ; I listened. Another scratch ; I cried, " Who is there ? " The door was opened, and Meta Holdenis appeared, dressed in her gray gown, with her neatly-plaited inside handkerchief, over which hung, as usual, the carnelian cross. It was her morning toilet ; but I thought I could see that the handkerchief, the collar of which caressed her chin, was spotless, and that she must have taken it fresh from the drawer, to do me the honor of it. She herself looked to me like a new Meta—a Meta I had not yet seen. There was a humid brilliancy about her eyes, expressive of unusual sweetness. They had been weeping, and were dilated by suffering ; they were so large that they swallowed up, as it were, the lower part of her face and the somewhat angular contour of her chin. The forehead swam in light ; it seemed as if the cherub of grief and repentance had poured a celestial dew over it. Beauty is ever the same, but there is nothing like character-faces ; they appear always new, and are veritable surprise-boxes.

Madame, an artist is, like everybody, subject to anger, indignation, contempt ; but his anger is sometimes at the mercy of his eyes. He thinks, with Bridgson,

that form is a great thing, and has indulgences for crimes that are accompanied by fine effects of light. My first impulse was to take a pencil, and to say to the singular person that was paying me this nocturnal visit, "Stop!—stand where you are, on the threshold of this door, and don't budge till I've sketched you!" But I bethought myself. New as she appeared to me, my recollections awoke, and saluted her by her real name. I recognized distinctly the flexible and graceful form which I had held in my arms, the two hands that had rested on my eyes, the mouth whose kisses were as cheap as its promises.

I turned away, and made a very expressive sign, which meant, "Begone!" She started back; then, as if mustering new courage, she entered the room and shut the door. And so, behold her alone with me, and in my room! The clock struck two.

"What do you want with me?" I cried, rudely. "Don't you see how odious you are to me?"

"Take pity on me," replied she, in a faltering voice. "I wish, before I leave, to curse my fault before you, and implore your pardon on my knees." She then threw herself on a chair, leaned both her elbows on the table, and, overwhelming me with an abundance of tears and adjectives, began what she called her confession—a wordy speech, incoherent and contradictory, in which I found it very difficult to distinguish truth from falsehood. Whatever she said, she half believed she was telling the truth. It was not so much a false soul as a perverted conscience. Accustomed at an early age to the gymnastics of sophistry,

she had contracted a fatal suppleness and the habit of persuading herself of all she pleased. Gymnastics are good things, madame, but they should be used with discretion. Do not allow your children to be exercised in dislocating their limbs or walking on their heads ; and do not allow their consciences too much reasoning. Better, by far, be a dullard than a juggler ! If ever I am a father, that shall be my maxim.

Meta began her defense very systematically. She accused herself with merciless harshness—rated her conduct in the most abusive terms. Gradually she began, not exactly to disculpate herself, but to plead extenuating circumstances as a palliation for her faults. Her excuses would have been impudent if they had not been so *naïve*. She told me that when M. de Mau-serre came to see her, to announce his departure to her, she felt piqued at the facility with which he left her ; that her coquetry (that was the very word she used) rebelled, and that she thought, then, all of a sudden, of the terrible use she could make of the pink letter-paper ; that, at first, she repelled such an idea with horror, but that it fastened upon her, and in the next moment she embraced it in a sort of blind and irresistible frenzy. She compared the fatal temptation to which she fell a victim to a sort of hallucination, and to the fearful attraction a precipice exercises over one looking dizzily into its depth. She concluded by saying that it was a trial sent by God ; that, in letting her succumb to the temptation, he had wished to teach her the divine virtue of repentance, of which she was as yet ignorant.

Thus she spoke : " I say, again, it was a juggling conscience, blindfolded. The balls started, flew, crossed each other in the air. Tony Flamerin would have applauded, had he not preferred being indignant."

" Indeed ! " said I, interrupting her. " Henceforth, the thief that shall break open a secretary may allege that he was in a state of hallucination ; the son that kills his father will complain that he was seized with vertigo—the dagger only conceived the idea, the hand followed it, the will was absent—and will not have the least difficulty in proving an *alibi*. Robbers and assassins must no longer be condemned. God induced them to do wrong, in order to perfect them by repentance. All very fine ! But there is still one point that makes me hesitate, and that is, that it is not enough to persuade one's self, but one must also persuade the judge."

She interrupted me in her turn, and, drawing from her pocket a letter she had received from her father in the morning, " That's what ruined me," she said.

I took the missive, which was rather a voluminous one, and looked rapidly over its first pages. M. Holdenis gave his daughter very circumstantial news of the whole pigeon-house, talking at length about her younger sisters and little brothers, assuring her, as it seemed to me, of Hermann's, Thecla's, Annchen's, Minnchen's, and Linchen's daily encouraging progress in ideality. " Only think ! " said one of the paragraphs, " yesterday our dear little Nicholas, after having looked at the sky, which was pure as thy heart, cried, ' How do you do, dear God ? ' This *naïve* exclamation moved us to tears, thy good mother and I."

However much interested I was in little Nicholas, I read far more attentively the last page of the letter, which ran thus :

“The confidences you have made us, dear angel, have plunged us in an inexpressible perplexity. Consider well before you decide upon sacrificing the brilliant prospects that open before you. You tell us that your heart is his. I answer you : Do not believe your heart too readily, dear child. The distance that separates us prevents my advising you ; but how can I believe that Heaven should destine for a husband to our Meta a man who has no other God than his talent—and, let me add, a man who has so shamefully behaved toward your father, and who will never be of any assistance to him ? The more I think of the combination of the truly providential circumstances to which you owe your acquaintance with M. de Mau-serre, the more I recognize in them a mysterious intention of Supreme Wisdom to bring you and this distinguished man together. God means, no doubt, to purify his heart and the use he makes of his wealth. Impious men attribute everything to chance. There is no chance. God has visibly chosen you to make his light shine before the world ; how guilty would you be, then, if, from wickedness or from a thoughtless inclination of your romantic imagination, you should refuse the high position to which he seems to call you ! Dear angel, think—think well ! and in your thoughts do not forget your poor father, who embraces you as he loves you.”

The reading of this stuff had a rather calming effect

upon me. My anger gave place to mirth. It had been a long time since I had read any of M. Holdenis's prose. His little providential theories seemed to harmonize admirably with that face of his, beaming with the consciousness of being one of the elect.

"Why did you show me this letter?" I asked Meta. "I shall never believe that this wretched piece of paper had the least influence upon your decisions. Why did not you do as I do now?"

And I tore the eight sheets that composed the paternal epistle into a thousand little bits, which I took special pleasure in seeing fly about the room like so many pretty butterflies.

"I meant to prove to you thereby," she replied, "that appearances are often deceitful." She stopped an instant; her skein was getting entangled; but she soon remedied this momentary embarrassment of mind and tongue, and, casting down her eyes, she continued: "Does not this letter prove to you that, if sometimes I may have appeared to you faithless, my heart never was?" And, without giving me time to put in a word, she told me impetuously that she had always loved me; that she never got over my departure from Geneva; that my image had remained engraven in her heart; that she had only come to Les Charmilles on the assurance Harris had given her that she would meet me there. Next she complained of me; pretended that she had never known what to think exactly of my feelings for her; that I had always treated the matter so jestingly; that she continually doubted my love; the rather taunting declaration I had made her in the cem-

etery had wounded her feelings ; in encouraging M. de Mauserre's attentions her purpose had been to excite my jealousy ; she was far from foreseeing the fatal consequences of this game : in short, what had happened was a good deal my own fault ; the very interview in the park had left her in doubt. She questioned the seriousness of my sentiments, and she wondered whether I would not seize upon the first pretext that presented itself to break my word to her.

At these words I burst into a Homeric laugh, and, having installed myself in an arm-chair as far as possible from her, I said : "That beats all, my dear ! By-and-by I shall be the only criminal in the case. It is my treachery, my perfidy, that has driven you to the course you have taken. You will make me believe that the other evening, after having tenderly kissed you, I ran to offer my heart and lips to another woman ! Can't you, for once in your life, be sincere, and confess that, if you are more sensible than tender, you are still more ambitious than sensible ? The secret of your conduct lies in the prophecy of the gypsy. Confess that women of your stamp are in the habit of chasing two hares at the same time, and that you have been trying the experiment to aim in turns at a rabbit—your humble servant here—and at a hare, sometimes called Baron Grüneck and sometimes M. de Mauserre. The hare is off ; I dare you now to catch the rabbit !"

She uttered a cry of horror, and ordered me to be silent, and not insult her love for me. At last, however, she confessed that there was some truth in my explanation. "Well, yes, then !" cried she, in a heart-

rending tone. "Yes, yesterday I had two souls fighting within me as for life and death. God be praised, one of them fell, shattered to atoms by misfortune; but the other lives, and lives to love you, and you alone!"

A few seconds after, before I knew what she was doing, she was at my feet, and, despite all my endeavors to free myself from her, she had taken both my hands. I wish I could repeat to you the outbursts of eloquence she wasted on me. My modesty forbids reiterating the tender and passionate declarations she made me—to wit, that she adored me; that her conduct toward me had been unqualifiably blameworthy; that, if I would pardon her, her whole life should be employed to atone for these wrongs; that I should be loved as no man had ever been loved; that I had no idea of the treasures of enthusiasm and devotion buried in her heart; that she would henceforth live, breathe, for me alone; that I should be her all—her universe, her ideal, and her God.

At the risk of passing for a coxcomb in your eyes, I shall say that at that moment she was sincere. I add that, whether sincere or not, she was strangely beautiful—a beauty both devilish and angelic. Grief and passion seemed to model her face, as the fingers of the sculptor model the clay he fashions. There was on her neck, cheeks, brow, a change of lights and shades, the secret of which I shall despair ever to discover. In the vivacity of her movements her hair had become loose, and fell in rich disorder over her shoulders; her handkerchief also had suffered some damage, and gave

my eyes a perilous liberty. Her lips were burning, her liquid eyes fixed on mine. They said, plainly : "Do you not see that I am yours? Do with me as you please !" But they said also, as in a little side-speech, "If you succumb to the temptation, you must keep me, and I shall marry you!"

It was, madame, I confess, a critical moment. I was dreadfully agitated ; I could hardly breathe. My head swam in a thousand lights, and I really do not know how this scene might have ended, when suddenly, madame, one of the cocks of the château began to crow lustily in the farm-yard. His clear, piercing, metallic, warlike voice made me start in my chair. I saw again my father on his death-bed ; he was looking at me. The cock crowed again, and I heard the cooper of Beaune calling to me, "Tony, life is a combat ; distrust thy impulses !" and, the cock having for the third time sounded his war-trumpet, I looked fixedly at Meta. It seemed to me that her large, limpid eyes resembled the azure waters of those beautiful African lakes in which the crocodiles live.

She watched me anxiously, wondering what I could be thinking about. I pushed her gently away, got up, obliged her to do the same, took her by the arm, led her across the room, opened the door, and pointed to the stairs and the lamp that lighted them. She grew faint, but immediately recovered herself. Tumbling her hair with her hands, she cried to me, as if suddenly seized with the fury of a sybil, "Cursed be the woman that you shall love !" With that she disappeared like a ghost.

Three hours later she had left Les Charmilles, where her departure left a few hearts easier and an inconsolable little girl. In hearing the carriage roll away that took her governess, the poor child rent the air with her cries.

Is it necessary to add that M. and Madame de Mauserre are married? Lulu will henceforth have no other teacher but her mother, who, since this experience, has become less trustful and an earlier riser.

M. de Mauserre has reëntered public life, and is a deputy; his seat at the Chamber is on the reasonable side of the Right Centre, but he takes care now and then to vote against the Government. It was said, the other day, that he was about to receive a very important official position.

One night last winter I was traveling from Lyons to Valence, where I was going to visit a friend. I was alone in the car when we left Perrache; it was lighted by a dim light, and I pulled my fur cap over my eyes, settling myself to sleep, when, at Vienna, three women entered my compartment. By their costume I judged them to be Protestant deaconesses, and from their conversation I gathered that they were going to Italy to take charge of an evangelical school. They were young, and inclined to prattle. Speaking German, they did not hesitate to continue their conversation before me. With my face buried in the collar of my cloak, I gave no sign of life; but I was listening!

One of the three seemed to exercise over the two

others the prestige of an abbess, and, although her voice was sweet, there was a tone of authority about it that bordered on *hauteur*. In speaking of the last war, she remarked that the French were a people amiable enough, but very immoral, and sadly corrupted. As a proof of this, she related, as a positive fact, that, having entered as governess a French family where a painter of great reputation was just then visiting, he dared, on the very first day, to make her a wild declaration of love ; and that the father of her pupil, having declared himself also in love with her, had used every means to seduce her ; that these two amorous men, crazed by jealousy, came near blowing each other's brains out ; and that, to get rid of their attentions, she was obliged to fly from the house by night, amid a thousand perils, from which only the grace of God could have saved her.

When the train reached Valence the conversation had ceased. The two youngest of these daughters of Zion slept the sleep of innocence ; the third—namely, the one that spoke so well—with eyes half closed, was thinking, no doubt, about her past or probable future. Before she got out I bent toward her, and, to her great surprise, recited to her the two first verses of “The King of Thule,” which I took the liberty—may Goethe forgive me !—to retouch a little. “There was at Thule,” I whispered, in her ear, “a little mouse that lied until she died”—

“Es war ein Mäuschen in Thule,
Das log bis in das Grab.”

You will perhaps ask me, madame, if my heart is quite cured, and if I do not still think sometimes of this little mouse? This is my secret, however, and I leave it to you to guess. You will also ask me what is to be concluded from my story, for you do not like stories that come to no conclusion. Mine is to prove that it is good to watch the crowing of the cock, and mind its meaning. If my father had not taught me this beautiful lesson, I might, perhaps, be making this day the journey through life with a very distinguished partner, but a very dangerous one.

Next, my story goes to explain how, in offering me the hand of a charming person with blue eyes, you have put me on my guard. I confess it, sky-blue eyes scare me : one has to look at them very closely, and into their very depths. God bless you, madame, you have not two souls—may Heaven preserve us both from quagmires, from an irresolute will, from equivocal characters, from troubled hearts, and from subtile consciences !

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